

A week in the life of the world | *Global edition*
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PLUS

Russia and North Korea's
unsettling new alliance ₁₀

The Guardian Weekly

THE
MAN
WHO
WOULD
BE
PM

Up close and personal with Keir Starmer ₃₄

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW



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Eyewitness China

PHOTOGRAPH:
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📍 Lotus positioning

Women practise yoga on a footbridge crossing a lotus pond at Tiande Lake Park in Taizhou as part of the International Day of Yoga on 21 June. The annual celebration, co-sponsored by the United Nations, is marked by events around the world to promote the benefits of yoga for physical and mental wellbeing.



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28 JUNE 2024



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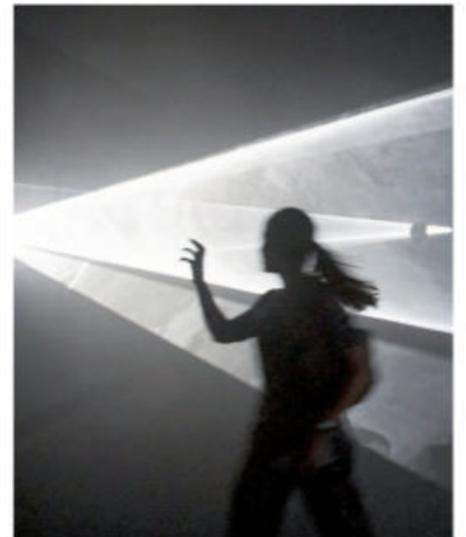
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MATT BLEASE



On the cover

The UK general election is now just days away and opinion polls have consistently pointed to the likelihood of a Labour victory. But for many, the man who could be the country's next prime minister remains something of a closed book. This week, Keir Starmer gives one of his most personal interviews yet to Charlotte Edwardes. Photograph: Murdo MacLeod/Guardian Design

Global report

Headlines from the last seven days

GW

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1 UKRAINE

Zelenskiy replaces leading commander in Russia war

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy replaced the commander of the Joint Forces Command of Ukraine's military, after a well-known soldier accused the commander of causing mass casualties in the war with Russia.

In a video address on Monday, Zelenskiy said Lt Gen Yuriy Sodol (below) had been replaced by Brig Gen Andriy Hnatov, without giving a reason for the shake up.

Sodol was removed shortly after Bohdan Krotevych, the leader of Ukraine's revered Azov regiment, accused the general of causing significant military setbacks and major losses in personnel.

In a post on the Telegram messaging app, Krotevych did not identify Sodol by name, but said an unnamed general "has killed more Ukrainian soldiers than any Russian general".

"All the military personnel now understand who I am talking about because 99% of the military hate him for what he does," Krotevych said, adding he had appealed to Ukraine's state bureau of investigation to conduct an investigation into Sodol.

Ukraine has recently made several military changes as Kyiv's forces aim to turn the tide.

The big story [Page 10](#) →



2 UNITED STATES



Assange goes free after deal with US justice department

Julian Assange was expected to plead guilty to violating US espionage law this week in a deal to allow him to return home to his native Australia. The 52-year-old was released from a British prison on Monday and flew to Saipan to plead guilty to a single count of conspiring to obtain and disclose classified US national defence documents. Under the deal, which could spell the end to a years-long saga, it was expected Assange would face no further jail time.

The WikiLeaks founder has been heralded by many around the world as a hero who brought to light US military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan, but his reputation has also been tarnished by rape allegations, which he denies.

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4 RUSSIA

Gunmen who targeted religious buildings killed

Five people responsible for multiple gun attacks on churches and synagogues in the Dagestan region were "eliminated", authorities said as the region began three days of mourning.

A criminal investigation was launched under anti-terrorism laws after gunmen killed 19 people in coordinated attacks in two cities in the North Caucasus.

Russia's Investigative Committee said 15 law enforcement officers and four civilians, including a Russian Orthodox priest, were killed during attacks on religious buildings in the cities of Derbent and Makhachkala on Sunday evening. Two Orthodox churches, two synagogues and a police checkpoint were attacked.

Reuters reported that gunmen burst into an Orthodox church and a synagogue in the ancient city of Derbent, killing 66-year-old priest, Nikolai Kotelnikov.

The Russian president, Vladimir Putin, offered his "deepest condolences" to those who had lost loved ones in Dagestan and Crimea, the Kremlin said on Monday.

3 UNITED STATES

Series of mass shootings in a weekend of violence

A series of mass shootings rocked the US early on Sunday, leaving at least one dead and 34 others wounded in four cases reported in New York, Alabama, Missouri and Ohio.

The shootings came amid a broader spate of mass shootings, including one at an Arkansas grocery store last Friday that left four dead and nine wounded.

The violence brought the number of mass shootings in the US so far this year, as of Sunday, to more than 240, according to the Gun Violence Archive. The high rate has prompted calls for more substantial gun control.

5 UNITED STATES

Hunter Biden requests new trial after gun conviction

Lawyers for Hunter Biden have requested a new trial. Biden was found guilty earlier this month on three felony counts related to a handgun purchase while he was a user of crack cocaine.

In a court filing on Monday, Biden's lawyer argued the "convictions should be vacated" because the judge lacked jurisdiction to hold a trial because of pending rulings in his appeals case. A federal appeals court had rejected two attempts to dismiss the gun charges, but Biden's lawyer said that the court had not yet issued a formal mandate denying one of those appeals.

6 CANADA

Brain illness investigation curtailed, scientist says

A senior Canadian scientist has alleged the government shut down an investigation into a mystery brain illness that he says may have affected 350 people.

In a leaked email seen by the Guardian, Prof Samuel Weiss, a neuroscientist working for the Canadian federal agency responsible for funding medical research, wrote that the government had deliberately curtailed the search for an explanation.

He is the second federal scientist to accuse the government of deliberately halting the investigation and to say that the caseload is higher than the government has acknowledged.

9 NATO

Outgoing Dutch PM to become secretary general

The outgoing Dutch prime minister, Mark Rutte, has won the race to become the next head of Nato at a perilous moment for the western alliance, after his only rival withdrew his bid.

The long-serving Dutch leader was expected to be confirmed formally as Nato's secretary general in the coming days and take over when the incumbent head, Jens Stoltenberg, steps down on 1 October after nearly a decade in charge.

Rutte's appointment comes as Ukraine faces relentless pressure from Russian bombardment in its eastern regions, while Nato-sceptic Donald Trump vies for another term in the White House.

10 UNITED STATES



Ancient Maya vase bought for \$4 returned to Mexico

Mexico has regained a lost ancient Maya vase because of a US woman who bought the artefact for just \$4 at a thrift store.

Anne Lee Dozier received an expression of gratitude from the Mexican embassy in her home town of Washington DC for her role in reuniting the 1,200- to 1,800-year-old vase with its motherland.

In an article for National Public Radio, Dozier said she bought the vase in 2019 at thrift store in Clinton, Maryland. Dozier had thought the vase was no more than three decades old.

7 PERU



Soldiers found guilty of rape in historic verdict

Ten soldiers have been found guilty of crimes against humanity for rapes committed four decades ago during the country's civil war.

A panel of three judges in Lima said the systematic use of rape by soldiers in the Manta y Vilca case - named after the communities where the abuses took place - qualified as a crime against humanity.

The case is the first collective proceeding in Peru over the mass use of sexual violence during the state's conflict with the Mao-inspired Shining Path rebels between 1980 and 2000.

8 SPAIN

Barcelona to ban apartment rentals to tourists by 2028

Barcelona, a top Spanish holiday destination, has announced it will bar apartment rentals to tourists by 2028, an unexpectedly drastic move as it seeks to rein in soaring housing costs and make the city livable for residents.

The city's leftist mayor, Jaume Collboni, said that by November 2028, Barcelona would scrap the licences of the 10,101 apartments currently approved as short-term rentals.

The boom in short-term rentals in Barcelona meant some residents could not afford an apartment after rents rose 68% in the past 10 years and the cost of buying a house rose by 38%, Collboni said.

11 AFGHANISTAN

Excluding women from UN conference a 'betrayal'

Excluding Afghan women from a UN conference on Afghanistan would be a "betrayal" of women and girls in the country, said rights groups and former politicians.

The Taliban are reportedly demanding no Afghan women be allowed to participate in the UN meeting in Doha starting on 30 June to discuss the international community's approach to Afghanistan, and that women's rights are not on the agenda.

Since taking power in August 2021, the Taliban have restricted women's access to education, employment and public spaces. In March, it was reported they would reintroduce public flogging and stoning of women for adultery.

19

17

15

13 INDIA



Open letter calls for end to Arundhati Roy prosecution

More than 200 Indian academics, activists and journalists have published an open letter urging the government to withdraw last week's decision sanctioning the prosecution of the Booker prize-winning author Arundhati Roy under stringent anti-terrorism law.

One of the signatories, the history professor Ajay Dandekar, said the decision was unjustified. Others also voiced support for Roy, including an umbrella group of farmer unions. Protests by rights groups and students in Delhi and Bengaluru have also taken place.

Opinion Page 48 →

12 NAMIBIA

High court overturns law banning gay sex

The high court has overturned a law that criminalised gay sex in a victory for LGBTQ+ campaigners after a number of setbacks in the battle for rights in African countries in recent years.

Namibia inherited a law banning "sodomy" when it gained independence from South Africa in 1990. While the ban was rarely enforced, activists said it contributed to discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, including violence by the police.

Friedel Dausab, the Namibian LGBTQ+ activist who brought the case, said: "I feel elated. I'm so happy. This really is a landmark judgment, not just for me, but for our democracy."

16

14 NEW CALEDONIA

Unrest after activists flown to France for detention

Buildings, including a police station and a town hall, were set on fire, authorities said, as the French Pacific territory was hit by a new surge of unrest.

It came after seven independence activists linked to a group accused of orchestrating deadly riots last month were sent to France for pre-trial detention.

The decision to transfer some defendants to mainland detention centres has sparked outrage among independence activists.

Riots broke out last month over electoral reform that would have allowed long-term residents to participate in local polls.

20

Global report

15 SAUDI ARABIA

**At least 1,300 hajj pilgrims die during extreme heat**

At least 1,300 people died during the hajj pilgrimage, which took place during intense heat, Saudi Arabia has said.

“Regrettably, the number of mortalities reached 1,301, with 83% being unauthorised to perform hajj and having walked long distances under direct sunlight, without adequate shelter or comfort,” the official Saudi Press Agency (SPA) reported.

Last Friday, a senior Saudi official gave a toll of 577 deaths for the two busiest days of hajj: 15 June, when pilgrims gathered in the blazing sun on Mount Arafat; and 16 June, when they participated in a ritual in Mina. The Saudi health minister, Fahd al-Jalajel, on Sunday described the management of the hajj this year as “successful”, SPA reported.

16 SOUTH AFRICA

MP suspended after using racist language in video

An MP was suspended by the Democratic Alliance (DA) for racist comments, less than a week after the white-led party formed a coalition government with the African National Congress.

A clip of Renaldo Gouws saying “Kill all the kaffirs” - a racial slur - and the N-word, has gone viral online. “Black people are discriminating against white people and the black people are singing about killing white people,” Gouws, a YouTuber, said in the video, which appears to be from 2010. The DA said Gouws had been suspended while he faced disciplinary charges.

17 ISRAEL

Intense phase of Gaza war nearly over, Netanyahu says

Benjamin Netanyahu has said the most intense phase of Israel’s assault against Hamas in Gaza is coming to an end, freeing up forces to move to the Lebanese border, where fears of a wider war with the militant group Hezbollah have increased.

In his first public interview with a Hebrew-language network outlet during more than eight months of conflict, Israel’s prime minister also walked back on his commitment to a US-backed ceasefire proposal with Hamas, instead suggesting a far more limited offer.

Netanyahu made the remarks on Israel’s rightwing Channel 14 as the top US military officer warned of the risk that Iran would be drawn into a wider war with Hezbollah, threatening US forces in the region.

“We will have the possibility of transferring some of our forces north, and we will do that,” Netanyahu said. He said he hoped a diplomatic solution to the crisis could be found but vowed to solve the problem “in a different way” if needed.

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18 PHILIPPINES

Boats rammed and boarded by Chinese coastguard

Manila has accused China’s coastguard of piracy in the disputed South China Sea after a violent confrontation in which it said its boats were rammed and boarded by Chinese personnel.

One Filipino sailor lost a thumb in the incident, according to the Philippines military.

China blamed the Philippines for the collision and has said “no direct measures” were taken against Filipino personnel, adding that its coastguards “were professional and restrained”.

It is the latest in a series of escalating confrontations in the South China Sea.

19 RUSSIA/VIETNAM

Putin agrees to strengthen ties during state visit

Russia and Vietnam pledged to strengthen ties as Vladimir Putin made a state visit to Hanoi that was intended to signal his country still has allies in the region.

The Russian president was met at Hanoi airport by the Vietnamese deputy prime minister Tran Hong Ha and the top party diplomat Le Hoai Trung. He arrived from a high-profile visit to North Korea, where he signed a defence pact with Kim Jong-un.

The Vietnamese president, To Lam, and Putin signed 11 memorandums for cooperation in areas including civil nuclear projects, energy and petrol cooperation and education. Putin told reporters that both sides had “identical or very close” positions on key issues.

The big story Page 10 →



20 NEW ZEALAND

Woman sues boyfriend after he fails to give her a lift

A woman has taken her long-term boyfriend to a disputes tribunal for breaching a “verbal contract” by failing to take her to the airport, resulting in her missing a flight to a concert and forcing her to delay her travel by one day.

The woman told New Zealand’s tribunal that she had entered into a “verbal contract” with her partner that he would take her to the airport and look after her dogs. But the tribunal referee Krysia Cowie said for an agreement to be enforceable there needed to be an intention to create a “legally binding relationship”.

The claim was dismissed.

DEATHS

**Donald Sutherland**

Canadian actor whose career included such highly acclaimed films as *Don’t Look Now*, *M*A*S*H* and *The Hunger Games*. He died on 20 June, aged 88.

Anouk Aimée

French actor who starred in European New Wave classics including *La Dolce Vita* and *A Man and a Woman*. She died on 18 June, aged 92.

Willie Mays

US Hall of Fame baseball player. He died on 18 June, aged 93.

Kazuko Shiraishi

Japanese poet. She died on 14 June, aged 93.

James Chance

US singer-saxophonist who helped start the No Wave movement of the late 1970s. He died on 18 June, aged 71.

George Woodwell

US ecologist who was one of the first scientists to sound the alarm about climate change. He died on 18 June, aged 95.

Global report United Kingdom



ELECTION 2024

Pressure on PM as election betting scandal grows

As general election campaigning entered the final week, Rishi Sunak's Conservatives were engulfed in a growing scandal over a number of bets placed on the timing of the election.

The Guardian originally revealed earlier this month that Craig Williams, who was Sunak's closest parliamentary aide, was being investigated by the Gambling Commission for betting £100 (\$125) on a July election three days before Sunak surprised the country by naming the date.

Since then at least five people linked to Sunak or the Conservatives have been identified as being part of the watchdog's inquiries. Senior Conservatives called for candidates and officials to be suspended pending the result of investigations.

Last weekend the veteran Tory cabinet minister Michael Gove said the betting row could be as damaging to the Conservatives as the Partygate scandal that led to the downfall of Boris Johnson.

Opinion polls in the run-up to the 4 July vote have consistently pointed to the likeliest outcome being a large majority for the Labour leader, Keir Starmer. If correct, that result would also signal a crushing defeat for Sunak, who has suffered a disastrous campaign.

An Opinion poll for the Observer last weekend put Labour on 40%, with the Tories languishing on just 20%. Reform UK, led by Nigel Farage, was breathing down the Tories' necks on 16%. The Lib were on 12% while the Greens stood at 9%.

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ELECTION 2024

Tories denounce Farage's defence of Putin's war

Rishi Sunak and a string of senior Conservatives condemned Nigel Farage for claiming the west provoked the Russian invasion of Ukraine, amid a growing internal Tory battle over how to deal with the Reform UK leader.

The prime minister accused Farage of playing "into Putin's hands" after he made the claim in a BBC interview, in which he linked Nato and EU expansion to the conflict in eastern Europe. Labour leader Keir Starmer also condemned Farage's comments as "disgraceful".

The Tories are divided over Farage. Some senior Conservatives fear the party could break in two, especially if a new leader opens the door to Farage joining.

Spotlight Page 17 →

WILDLIFE

Wildcat kittens born in 'major milestone'

The birth of wildcat kittens in the Cairngorms national park has been hailed as a "major milestone" in efforts to rescue the mammals from extinction in the UK.

These are potentially the first wildcats to be born outside captivity in Scotland for more than five years after 19 wildcats, bred at the Highland wildlife park, near Kingussie, were released last summer in a pilot project.



ROYAL FAMILY

Princess Anne treated for injuries after horse incident

The Princess Royal was in hospital this week with a head injury and concussion after an incident in which she was understood to have been injured by a horse.

Princess Anne, 73, who is the king's sister, suffered a concussion and minor injuries thought to have been caused by a horse on her estate at Gatcombe Park in Gloucestershire. She was expected to return home from hospital this week, but a working visit to Canada was postponed.

Buckingham Palace said in a statement that the princess was in hospital as a precautionary measure and was expected to make a full and swift recovery.



PRISONS

Capacity close to 'breaking point', governors told

Prison governors have been warned that jails will be so overcrowded by the second week of July that they will struggle to accept any more inmates.

The heads of jails in England and Wales were informed by HM Prison and Probation Service officials earlier this month that data pointed to an "operational capacity breaking point" only days after the 4 July general election.

The development signals a logistical headache for an incoming justice secretary. It is expected to trigger a crisis measure allowing offenders to be housed in police cells when jails are full.

Tom Wheatley, the president of the Prison Governors' Association, said the situation had been predicted "some time ago". He added: "The outgoing government did not take the necessary action in a timely fashion to avoid this."

Wheatley said any attempt to fill prisons beyond the operational capacity could be challenged in the courts.

77.2k

The number of likes, as of last Friday, on TikTok for a deepfake video of Nigel Farage playing Minecraft, in which the Reform UK leader purportedly says he has located Rishi Sunak's virtual base in the video game and intends to blow it up



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Reader's eyewitness

Take the heat
 'This gull had chosen a castle wall in Alicante, Spain, as the place to shade its chicks from the sun and was totally unfazed by the many sightseers.'
 By Andrew Clinton, Brighton, England, UK



SCIENCE AND ENVIRONMENT



POLLUTION

Study finds 2,000 children die every day from air pollution

Nearly 2,000 children under five are dying every day from air pollution, which has overtaken poor sanitation and a lack of clean water to become the second biggest health risk factor for young children around the world.

More than 8 million deaths, of children and adults, were caused by air pollution in 2021, according to a new study from the Health Effects Institute (HEI). Globally, dirty air is second only to high blood pressure as a risk factor for death among the general population.

This year's State of Global Air report also shows that the death rate linked to air pollution in children under five is 100 times higher in most of Africa than it is in high income countries.

Pallavi Pant, the lead author of the report and head of global health at HEI, said: "Far too much of the burden [is] borne by young children, older populations, and low and middle income countries."

PALAEONTOLOGY

Horned dinosaur dug up in Montana may be new species

Scientists may have dug up a new dinosaur species in Montana.

The Lokiceratops is possibly the fifth species of a large, horned family of dinosaurs found in the Kennedy Coulee, a dry gorge along the border of Montana and Alberta, Canada.

Mark Loewen, a palaeontologist who contributed to an article in the journal PeerJ, told Science News: "It's becoming more clear that [horned dinosaurs] were using these [bony features] as ornaments, in order to attract mates or intimidate rivals of the same species."

Part of the Ceratops family, the Lokiceratops roamed the Earth nearly 78m years ago.

MEDICAL RESEARCH

Covid research could explain why some escape infection

Scientists have discovered differences in the immune response that could explain why some people seem to reliably escape Covid infection. The study, published in Nature, suggested that

▼ An artist's impression of the newly identified dinosaur Lokiceratops, whose fossils were unearthed in Montana

SERGEY KRASOVSKIY/REUTERS



specialised immune cells could see off the virus at an early stage.

"We now have a much greater understanding of the full range of immune responses, which could provide a basis for developing potential treatments and vaccines that mimic these natural protective responses," said Dr Marko Nikolić, senior author of the study at University College London.

SPACE

Lunar probe returns samples from far side of the moon

China has become the first country to gather samples from the far side of the moon and bring them back to Earth in a landmark achievement for the Beijing space programme.

A capsule containing the precious cargo parachuted into a landing zone in the rural Siziwang Banner region of Inner Mongolia on Tuesday after being released into Earth's orbit by the uncrewed Chang'e-6 probe.

The return of the material wraps up a successful mission for the China National Space Administration amid a wave of interest in which space agencies and private companies will build instruments and bases on the moon and exploit its resources.

Vladimir Putin's defiant friendship pact with Kim Jong-un and North Korea marks a return to cold war politics - and raises big questions not just for Washington and Seoul, but also for Beijing

Partners in crime



▶ Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un met last week in Pyongyang

VLADIMIR SMIRNOV/
AFP/GETTY

Explainer
What do Russia and North Korea offer each other?
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Simon Tisdall
Ostracised leaders seek a new world order
Page 14 →

The big story *Russia/North Korea*

11

RUSSIA
By Andrew Roth



A

quarter of a century ago, Vladimir Putin flew to Pyongyang to sign a “friendship treaty” with Kim Jong-il that helped revive Russia’s relations with North Korea without obliging the two sides to come to each other’s aid in case of a military attack.

With his visit last week, Putin has in effect gone further into the past, signing a deal with Kim Jong-un reminiscent of the 1961 security pact that existed under the Soviet Union during the cold war. But today Russia is engaged in a hot war in Ukraine that Putin has made his foreign policy priority, and a nuclear North Korea has become a crucial lifeline of munitions for his military.

“The treaty that Putin signed with Kim Jong-un was a return to the cold war, but of course in the cold war North Korea had no nuclear weapons,” said Dr Edward Howell, the Korea Foundation fellow with the Asia-Pacific programme at Chatham House, and a lecturer at the University of Oxford.

While last week’s summit was years in the making, it nonetheless marked a watershed in Russia’s relationship with North Korea, and one that US officials have warned could destabilise an uneasy balancing act in the region.

“Russia has now put in writing just how willing and committed it is to deepening and expanding its cooperation with North Korea,” said Jamie Kwong, a fellow in the nuclear

‘The two leaders just don’t care. Kim now has a partner who is as delinquent as he is’

policy programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Kim admired Russian space technology and fighter jets during a summit last year with Putin in Russia’s far east, and his wishlist could include technologies that would aid North Korea’s space and missile programmes, as well as economic and energy support.

Putin’s immediate goal is to develop a partnership that has delivered millions of artillery shells, as well as ballistic missiles, desperately needed for his war in Ukraine. But the roots of the relationship go deeper: the two leaders have aligned in a growing anti-western coalition and seem increasingly unrestrained by western threats.

The image of Putin - who once regularly met US and European leaders - flying to Pyongyang to be feted by Kim was striking. Putin gave Kim a second Russian-built Aurus limousine, in a symbolic rejection of the sanctions the two sides have taken pleasure in flouting. “The two leaders really just don’t care,” said Howell. “That highlights how, for Kim Jong-un, he now has a partner who is as delinquent as he is.”

US and Nato officials have voiced concern over potential support for North Korea’s missile and nuclear programmes. A copy of the treaty published by North Korea explicitly listed cooperation in “peaceful nuclear energy”, while US officials told NBC News that Russia would also be providing technology to aid North Korea’s atomic submarine programme.

But analysts said the scope of support for North Korea’s military nuclear programme could remain limited, in part because Russia is nervous about sharing sensitive technology.

Some of the most concerning aspects of the agreement are more conventional: the reportedly growing arms trade between the two countries that could embolden North Korea and complicate western war planning in the case of an open conflict on the Korean peninsula.

Matthew Miller, a US state department spokesperson, said the provision of Russian weapons to Pyongyang “would destabilise the Korean





peninsula, of course, and potentially ... violate UN security council resolutions that Russia itself has supported”.

The US secretary of state, Antony Blinken, and South Korea’s foreign ministry said the treaty between Russia and North Korea posed a “serious threat” to peace and stability on the Korean peninsula. Blinken said the US would consider “various measures” in response to the pact.

“There’s a lot that Russia can still give North Korea at this juncture that would significantly improve North Korea’s ability to reconstitute its conventional military deterrent,” said Ankit Panda, the Stanton senior fellow in the nuclear policy programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

He believes the Russians would be ready to help North Korea improve its air defence capabilities, supply spare parts and maintenance for its ageing air force, and help modernise its navy, including technology for nuclear submarines. That would “substantially complicate planning for the US-South Korea alliance, which would support both Russian and North Korean strategic objectives”, Panda said.

The deal has already led to a heated back-and-forth between Russia and South Korea. Seoul last week indicated it could provide Ukraine with lethal weapons for the first time in response to the treaty. Putin, in turn, warned

that this would be a “big mistake” and that Moscow in response could make “decisions which are unlikely to please the current leadership of South Korea”.

The deal is also seen as a headache for China, which is caught between concerns about competition for influence in North Korea and the potential for the US to extend its support to South Korea as a result. Xi Jinping may seek a summit with Kim by the end of the year, Howell said.

The meeting also marked a new low point for international efforts at promoting nonproliferation, once a rare area of cooperation between Russia and the US.

Even in 2017, after the annexation of Crimea and the accusations of Russian interference in the US elections, the US still persuaded Russia to vote for new UN sanctions against North Korea, albeit watering them down in the process.

Those days are clearly now over.

“The agreement sends yet another signal that Putin is willing to put his war of aggression against Ukraine above all other interests, including promoting and safeguarding the nonproliferation regime – a regime that the Soviet Union really helped to establish in the first place,” said Kwong. *Observer*

ANDREW ROTH IS THE GUARDIAN AND OBSERVER’S GLOBAL AFFAIRS CORRESPONDENT

▲ Kim Jong-un and Vladimir Putin go for a drive during the Russian leader’s trip to Pyongyang

STR/KCNA/KNS/AFP/GETTY

‘Moscow could make decisions unlikely to please the current leadership of South Korea’

EXPLAINER
DIPLOMACY

Friends reunited

What can Russia and North Korea do for each other?

By Justin McCurry TOKYO

China accounts for more than 90% of North Korea’s trade and has been its most dependable aid donor and diplomatic ally. But as Vladimir Putin’s visit to Pyongyang proves, the secluded state’s behaviour is being increasingly influenced by its security and economic ties with Russia.

How does Russia help North Korea?

China is not the only regional power to have allegedly helped North Korea skirt UN sanctions and prevent its economy from collapsing. Last month, the US claimed Russia had been shipping refined petroleum to North Korea in quantities that reportedly exceed the limit imposed by the UN security council. John Kirby, the White House’s national security spokesperson, said the proximity of the two countries’ commercial ports meant the provision of oil could continue indefinitely. Border closures introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic dramatically reduced North Korea’s ability to trade and inflicted further damage on its fragile economy. Kim is believed to have secured supplies of food, as well as energy, from Russia, to address shortages, and was expected

to do the same when he met Putin last week.

In 2022, Russia and North Korea restarted train travel for the first time since railway journeys were cut after the emergence of Covid. Among the cargo on the first journey were 30 thoroughbred horses.

What can North Korea offer Russia?

North Korea is one of the most impoverished societies on Earth, but it has one commodity that has facilitated the burgeoning friendship between Putin and Kim Jong-un: military hardware. When they met in Vladivostok nine months ago, the leaders reportedly agreed to a deal that would see Russia share technological knowhow to assist North Korea's space programme in return for munitions and weapons for use in Ukraine. While the Kremlin has described reports of an arms deal as "absurd" there is evidence that North Korean ballistic

missiles have been used in Ukraine. South Korea's defence minister, Shin Won-sik, said in an interview with Bloomberg News that Seoul had identified at least 10,000 shipping containers sent from the North to Russia that are believed to hold artillery ammunition and other weapons.

North Korea also has a lucrative export industry in human resources: workers sent overseas to earn much-needed foreign currency for the regime. Russia is no exception. Russian officials have discussed "working on political arrangements" to employ 20,000 to 50,000 North Korean labourers, in defiance of a UN mandate requiring all its workers to be repatriated by the end of 2019. In 2022, Russia's ambassador in Pyongyang, Alexander Matsegora, said North Koreans could also be deployed to rebuild the infrastructure in occupied regions of Ukraine.

► Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang

GAVRIIL GRIGOROV/
AFP/GETTY

▼ Vladimir Putin is welcomed to North Korea

KCNA VIA KNS/AFP/GETTY



Is Russia trying to stymie sanctions against North Korea?

In its role as a permanent member of the UN security council, Russia has made tightening sanctions against the North far more difficult. Along with China, it voted against additional measures in response to ballistic missile launches in 2022, and in March it vetoed the renewal of a UN panel of experts tasked with monitoring the implementation of security council sanctions. Despite political tensions among its five permanent member states, the security council once managed to maintain unanimity in frustrating Pyongyang's ballistic missile and nuclear ambitions. That consensus has been shattered.

What has changed since Putin's last visit?

When Putin last visited Pyongyang, in 2000, Russia was a member of the G8. North Korea, then ruled by Kim's father, Kim Jong-il, was still six years away from conducting its first nuclear test. The geopolitical climate has changed beyond recognition, driven by a more hardline Putin and a younger Kim determined to turn his county into a genuine nuclear power. Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, coupled with a record number of North Korean missile tests the same year, have deepened both countries' international isolation. That, in turn, has driven Putin and Kim together in a mutually beneficial challenge to a "hostile" US and its allies. It culminated last week in economic and security agreements that, in Putin's words, demonstrate that these "comrades-in-arms" are "ready to confront the ambition of the collective west".

JUSTIN MCCURRY IS THE GUARDIAN'S TOKYO CORRESPONDENT





COMMENTARY

Dangerous alliance

Putin and Kim are the odd couple with a dual mission

By Simon Tisdall

They make an odd couple. One is smiley-faced and chubby. The other is thin-lipped and scowls a lot. Both are dictators, sinister, brutal and unaccountable in their different ways. Both have made it their mission to overturn the post-1945 global order, defying the US, its chief patrolman. And both are sanctioned, ostracised and a little bit feared by the west.

Those fears are likely to intensify after last week's Pyongyang summit, both symbolic and substantive, between this unofficial Laurel and Hardy tribute act. North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-un - the plump one - and Russia's Vladimir Putin - the skinny one - have a shared aim: consolidating their place in a bullish anti-western, anti-democratic alliance, ostensibly representing a "new world order", reaching from China to Iran.

Like most world leaders, Putin, the dominant partner in an oddball relationship, paid scant attention to Kim prior to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine two years ago. All that changed with the onset of war.

It was a gift to Kim. His idea of diplomacy is to issue threats to acquire leverage he otherwise lacks. His efforts mostly revolve around test-firing ever-longer-range ballistic missiles capable of hitting the US's west coast (as well as South Korea and Japan) and developing and miniaturising nuclear bombs and warheads.

Yet after the collapse of Donald Trump's pantomime peace palaver with Kim in Hanoi in 2019, snail's-pace talks with Washington and its partners on normalising relations, lifting sanctions and denuclearisation of

the Korean peninsula ground to a halt. Kim shifted tack. He is fully committed to the Moscow-Beijing axis. Now he's backing Putin to the hilt in Ukraine.

North Korea recognised the Russian-occupied puppet republics of Donetsk and Luhansk in July 2022. And, according to the US and South Korean governments, Kim has provided Russia with dozens of ballistic missiles - debris from some has reportedly been found in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine - and over 11,000 containers of ammunition, containing millions of artillery shells. In return, or so western countries believe, Putin is helping Kim upgrade his nuclear, missile and space technologies.

This burgeoning relationship is about much more than weaponry. Putin spelled it out in an article published by North Korean state media. "We will develop alternative mechanisms of trade that are not controlled by the west, and jointly resist illegitimate unilateral restrictions [sanctions]," he wrote. "At the same time, we will build an architecture of equal and indivisible security in Eurasia [despite] US pressure, blackmail and military threats."

Putin probably thinks this is all very clever. In fact, his Pyongyang-politik reflects a degree of desperation with significant potential downsides. While some biggish countries that should know better, such as India, Brazil, Saudi Arabia and South Africa, continue to sit on the fence on Ukraine, the overwhelming consensus at a peace summit in Switzerland earlier this month was that Russia is acting illegally and should withdraw.

Putin is isolated diplomatically, and to a lesser degree economically, to a damaging extent. In years past, the idea of Russia needing impoverished North Korea's support would have been met with derision. It also says something about the weakness of Russia's vaunted arms industry that it is so reliant on imported shells.

Another possible downside of Putin's east-Asian power games is the dubious view taken by China, his vastly more important "no-limits" ally. Beijing has had a sometimes difficult relationship with its volatile neighbour, especially over its regionally destabilising nuclear threats. Last month, Kim reacted angrily to talks between China, Japan and South Korea on denuclearisation. He has vowed never to give up his nukes. China worries that a bilateral partnership of the type Putin is due to announce could threaten its security.

The Biden administration is fully aware of the negative strategic and geopolitical implications of deepening Russia-North Korea ties. But it has done little to hinder the process. Since Trump, contacts with the North have been minimal. Visiting the demilitarised zone of Panmunjom in April, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, US ambassador at the UN, complained Moscow and Beijing were rewarding North Korea's "bad behaviour" by shielding it from sanctions. Admitting a lack of US leverage, Thomas-Greenfield urged Russia and China "to reverse course and ... urge Pyongyang to choose diplomacy". But as his visit demonstrates, Putin, China's leader Xi Jinping and Kim are simply not listening.

North Korea is but one piece on a much bigger 21st-century chessboard. As in Ukraine as in Gaza, the old world of pax Americana and an international order based on the UN Charter is dying before our eyes. In its place, a terrible travesty is born.

SIMON TISDALL IS THE OBSERVER'S FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMENTATOR

ILLUSTRATION BY
PETE REYNOLDS

“
In the past, the idea of Russia needing North Korea's support would have been met with derision
”

ISRAEL

Fears grow of war with Hezbollah

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Spotlight



UNITED KINGDOM
GENERAL
ELECTION



'Enough is enough' In red wall, Tory support is crumbling

By Josh Halliday
Photographs by Gary Calton

It sounds odd to describe a well-to-do village with neat privet hedges, freshly mown lawns and three cars on each driveway as a no-go area. Yet for almost three decades, the pretty parish of Silkstone, on the edge of the Pennines, was unwelcoming territory for Labour folk.

The village, centred around a 12th-century church 6km outside Barnsley, was a bastion of Conservative blue surrounded by Labour red. But last May, Silkstone elected its first Labour councillor in a generation. A second followed a year later.

The electoral tremors from this little blue enclave may not have been felt in

Westminster. But they help explain why Keir Starmer looks set to win a historic parliamentary majority on 4 July. Not only is Labour winning back supporters in the “red wall”, but it is also breaking ground in areas it has not held for decades.

“When I said there were no no-go areas, this is what I meant,” said Dr Marie Tidball, Labour’s candidate for Penistone and Stocksbridge in South Yorkshire, marching around what she describes as “the safest Tory ward” in the region until recently.

The breakthrough in Silkstone came not just from Starmer moving his party to the centre ground of British

▲ Marie Tidball on the campaign trail for Labour in Penistone and Stocksbridge

Continued



politics. It was also, said Tidball, on the back of a ground campaign that started more than two years ago, when she was selected: “I’ve been out in the wind, rain, sun, snow. We very much haven’t just been out when it’s election time, and people appreciate that.”

In 2019, this collection of former mining villages and market towns turned its back on Labour over Brexit and Jeremy Corbyn. Voters elected Miriam Cates as the first Conservative MP in South Yorkshire since 1992.

But the enthusiasm that helped Boris Johnson to his 80-strong majority has gone into reverse, with the Tories apparently retreating from serious campaigning in many of the “red wall” seats it captured in 2019.

In 2019, Johnson campaigned in the constituency with Cates, but Rishi Sunak has spent recent weeks visiting areas with majorities of more than 14,000 votes - leaving areas like Penistone and Stocksbridge, with its 7,210-vote majority, seemingly cast adrift.

Outside the DIY shop Do It Yer Sen, in Penistone, Caron Wadsworth said she voted Conservative for the first time in 2019 but would not do so again. “I always vote, but I haven’t made my mind up,” she said.

Wadsworth, 59, took redundancy this month from a catalogue company where she had worked for almost four decades. She said she had little faith in any party to fix the UK’s chronic challenges.

Her husband, Ian Wadsworth, 62, embodies two of the incoming government’s most pressing issues: he is one of a record number of people out of work due to long-term illness - in his case serious knee and arm injuries caused by 40-plus years in the building trade - and NHS backlogs.

Wadsworth said he was desperate to work but has been waiting eight years for a knee operation on the NHS. He



is now paying £7,000 (\$8,800) to go private. Out of his three private pensions, he has already cashed in two.

His experience has left him so disillusioned he has vowed not to vote at all any more, having backed Labour all his life. “I won’t vote. They’re all the same,” he said. “I’ve paid my taxes all them years. They haven’t done nothing for me. Nobody’s done owt.”

Seeking to feed on this resentment is Nigel Farage, who said this month Reform UK was “significantly ahead of the Conservatives” in “red wall” seats. He toured the villages outside Penistone in an open-top battlebus before visiting Barnsley, where a man was arrested for pelting him with objects from a construction site.

Cates, a rising star of the Tory right, is alive to the threat from Farage. In an article for the Daily Express newspaper this month, Cates scotched rumours that she could defect to Reform, saying she would “take my chances” as a Tory candidate despite having “so much in common” with the rightwing party.

An evangelical Christian, Cates has made her name in Westminster on the frontline of the culture wars - advocating cuts to higher education, for example, to prevent youngsters being “indoctrinated” with liberal ideas.

But those issues seem far from anyone’s top priority in her constituency, where voters complain about a broken NHS, the cost of living crisis, housing, transport and a general sense

▲ Shoppers at Penistone market in a constituency that in 2019 returned the first Conservative MP in South Yorkshire since 1992

of “anti-politics”. One Labour activist said there was deep cynicism towards all parties on the doorstep.

Tidball, the odds-on favourite, is seeking to counter the distrust by burnishing her local credentials: she was born in Penistone and grew up in Stocksbridge. Her mother was the head of a nursery, while her father - a Labour county councillor - worked in secondary schools and helped set up Barnsley College.

In Silkstone, true blue territory, she was met with broad encouragement by many of the retirees. “I just voted for you,” hollered Frank Huby, 72, from his freshly trimmed garden as he spotted Tidball. The former miner said he and his wife abstained from voting in 2019 because Corbyn “destroyed” the party.

Down the street a retired police worker, who did not want to be named, said he would vote Labour due to a “loss of trust” with the Tories. Asked if he had seen any benefit from levelling up, Johnson’s flagship policy, he replied: “Zero. It’s probably worse, if anything.”

Glyn Littlewood, 63, a retired university lecturer, gleefully took a Labour poster to put in his window with the aim of annoying his dwindling number of Tory neighbours. “To vote Conservative you either have to be incredibly stupid or incredibly rich,” he said. “For 14 years it’s been despicable. Enough’s enough.” *Observer*

JOSH HALLIDAY IS THE NORTH OF ENGLAND EDITOR AT THE GUARDIAN

‘I won’t vote. They’re all the same. I’ve paid my taxes all them years. Nobody’s done owt’

Ian Wadsworth
Penistone resident



📍 Caron Wadsworth voted Tory in 2019 but is not doing so again

ANALYSIS
UNITED KINGDOM

Poll positions From defeat to total wipeout – three outcomes facing Tories

By Peter Walker



Polls that use large-scale polling data to extrapolate individual seat tallies, or *MRPs* – an acronym for multilevel regression and poststratification – have become popular in UK politics. Three such polls published last week all gave pretty different results. What would the scenarios illustrated mean for the Conservatives if they were replicated on 4 July?

Solid Labour majority More in Common poll:

155 Tory MPs

Amazing as it might sound, a lot of Tory party officials and candidates would probably accept this result if it was offered now: a Labour majority of 162.

Even with this scenario there would be some high-profile casualties; understandably, given it would be a cull of 210 Tories from the 2019 election. Jeremy Hunt, the chancellor, would lose his seat to the

Lib Dems, with his fellow cabinet ministers Grant Shapps and Mark Harper ousted by Labour.

What would the remaining parliamentary party look like? There are many imponderables, not least an influx of new MPs. It would, at least, be the opposition by some distance – the Lib Dems would have 50 MPs – and there would be plenty of big beasts to fight to be leader were Rishi Sunak to step down or be challenged.

Jostling for this race has already begun, with Kemi Badenoch, Priti Patel, Suella Braverman and Robert Jenrick expected to try their luck from the right of the party.

For the centrists, while Shapps would be gone, the home secretary, James Cleverly, would still be around, as would Penny Mordaunt, whose Portsmouth seat is seen as very vulnerable to Labour.

Massive Labour majority YouGov poll: 108 Tory MPs

If still not approaching a Canada 1993-style complete wipeout, this would still be the Tories' lowest-ever Commons tally. The Labour majority of 200 would be greater than that won by Tony Blair in 1997.

The list of top Conservatives losing their seats would also increase, taking in Gillian Keegan, the education secretary, who would lose in Chichester to the Lib Dems, who would gain 67 seats overall.

Senior Tories toppled by Labour would include Mordaunt, as well as Shapps and Harper, plus Mel Stride, the work and pensions secretary, with Cleverly's seat too close to call.

If the home secretary joined Mordaunt and Shapps in being ousted, that would leave the ranks of senior centrist Tories quite

Role models
MRP polling can be hugely informative, but it is heavily caveated, not least by the pollsters themselves, all of whom stress that many dozens of seats are too close to call – meaning the totals could end up being quite different. Those who put together the polls also stress that, as with all algorithm-based models, the numbers you get depend on not just the raw polling results, but also the complex models used to crunch the data. And, as with all polls, they give a snapshot, not a prediction.

thinned, perhaps needing someone like Tom Tugendhat to step up.

Another key change in this scenario is Reform UK winning five seats, among them Clacton, where Nigel Farage is standing. Would a decimated and divided Conservative party be vulnerable to a hostile takeover by Farage?

Tory wipeout Savanta poll: 53 Tory MPs

Yes, the Conservative parliamentary party would still exist, but it could comfortably fit into one of the larger Commons committee rooms.

Savanta's list of senior Conservatives who could lose their seats under this scenario is, as you would expect, the most eye-popping yet, taking in a series of MPs from the right of the party.

Under this scenario, Braverman and Badenoch would be vulnerable – and even Sunak himself.

What would be left for the stragglers in this post-apocalyptic Tory landscape? Whoever took over would, at least, be the opposition leader under this model, which predicts a Lib Dem total of 50. They would, however, be facing a Labour parliamentary party that was almost 10 times bigger, at 516.

Who would emerge as leader from this wreckage? It is impossible to tell, not least because it's hard to know how many viable candidates would even want to take on this most thankless challenge.

One curiosity of the Savanta MRP is that it predicts zero Reform seats, not even one for Farage, meaning that if the Conservatives did want to make him their leader, they would need to find a seat for him first.

PETER WALKER IS A SENIOR POLITICAL CORRESPONDENT FOR THE GUARDIAN



FRANCE

Can left overcome its bitter rivalries to defy the far right?

The 'New Popular Front' of Socialists, Greens and Communists could be the best hope of keeping out Marine Le Pen's National Rally

By Kim Willsher
MONTREUIL

▼ People at the launch of France's new leftwing coalition in Montreuil

THOMAS PADILLA/AP

The posters strung across the street in Montreuil, east of Paris, were still fluttering in the breeze days after the stage, the microphones and the politicians at the launch of France's newest political force had gone.

Here, out of the smouldering ashes of the country's bickering left, a coalition had risen to take on the far right.

The Nouveau Front Populaire (New Popular Front; NFP) is a tetchy alliance of Socialists (PS), Greens

(EELV), Communists (PCF), hard left Insoumisés (Unbowed; LFI), and other red-banner candidates that polls suggest is the country's best - if not only - hope of staving off a Rassemblement National (National Rally; RN) majority government in the final round of legislative voting.

For France's Socialists, allying with LFI after its outspoken leader Jean-Luc Mélenchon's insults and attacks on the man who led their European campaign, Raphaël Glucksmann, has been a bitter pill to swallow. But swallow it they must, Glucksmann said, if they are to win what he calls "the mother of all battles".

"It's complicated ... I'm not going to tell you it's a marriage of love," he said of the left's new coalition.

The coalition has agreed to divvy up constituencies to ensure no leftwing candidate stands in opposition to another. But its launch in Montreuil last Monday evening was tense.

Establishing a programme for the hastily created NFP hydra, most of whose heads loathe each other, has involved even more pill swallowing and compromise.

What it has come up with is a manifesto to increase the minimum

wage; freeze the price of essential goods and energy; abolish the pension age rise to 64, reducing it back down to 60; and tax rises on income, property, wealth and inheritance. It has denied opponents' claims that this will cost between €100-200bn (\$107-214bn), but has yet to produce its own figure.

Émeric Bréhier, the director of the Observatory of Political Life at the Jean-Jaurès Foundation thinktank, said the left had been forced to rise above considerable differences by the prospect of an RN majority in the 577-seat Assemblée Nationale.

"By joining forces nationally the aim is to get as many [NFP] candidates as possible into the second round," Bréhier said.

"The RN hasn't put a foot wrong in this campaign ... it has gained credibility and made people think it's another normal party. It is saying things people want to hear. To fight it, the left has had to cooperate and compromise to form an alternative political force," he said.

Emmanuel Macron, who called the snap election, has presented his centrist alliance as the only political alternative to Marine Le Pen and the RN's president, Jordan Bardella. Polls suggest otherwise. A poll for Les Echos



by Opinionway on Saturday suggested the RN was still well ahead with 35% of intentions to vote in the first round, followed by 28% for the NFP and 22% for Macron's coalition.

Bréhier said the predicted high turnout and a lower number of candidates this time could lead to more "triangulars": the unusual situation where three candidates qualify for the second-round vote instead of two. In the past, when two parties faced the far right, one would often withdraw to avoid splitting the vote.

So far, the PS and LFI have said they will advise voters to support whoever will keep out the RN after the first round vote on 30 June.

But while in previous elections voters of all stripes have tended to vote against the far right, this time may be different. For many in France, Mélenchon's radical left is as distasteful as Le Pen's far right.

Last week, Kylian Mbappé, captain of the France men's football team, warned voters to shun "les extremes", a comment interpreted by some as criticism of the radical left as well as the far right.

In Montreuil town hall, mayor Patrice Bessac, of the French Communist party, said an RN government would shake everyone in a town with a large migrant population of more than 60 nationalities and be a wider threat to French social cohesion.

"People here are afraid. They know the far right's first target will be the immigrant population and working-class areas like ours," Bessac said.

"The danger from the far right means the left must put disagreements aside. The only thing that matters is that we propose a new path for the country that is not the RN."

Glucksmann, who led the PS's relatively successful European campaign - it came third narrowly behind Macron's party - said he understood the reluctance of his "social democrat, ecologist and pro-European" supporters to vote for an LFI candidate but that unity was the only way to avoid a "triumph of the worst".

In a *Le Monde* op-ed he wrote: "We must prevent France from sinking into the abyss in a few days' time. This is the mother of all battles, the battle that makes all the others possible. There is little time left, very little time, and history is watching us." *Observer*

KIM WILLISHER IS A FOREIGN CORRESPONDENT BASED IN PARIS



▲ Olaf Scholz and the Guardian's editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner, in Berlin last week

DAS PROGRESSIVE ZENTRUM/YOUTUBE

GERMANY



Call for hope Scholz's plan to win back young voters

By Deborah Cole and
Kate Connolly BERLIN

The best way to win back young voters from the far right is to give them hope, security and respect so that everyone "from an untrained Amazon worker" to "Elon Musk's son" can live without fear of the future, the German chancellor has said.

After young people voted for the far right in large numbers at the European parliamentary election, Olaf Scholz said it was necessary to closely address their anxieties. These included labour rights, global security, climate protection, a world shaped by artificial intelligence and an "international order ... which is something you can rely on".

Scholz was speaking at a summit of progressive politicians and think-tanks in Berlin last Friday, chaired by the Guardian's editor-in-chief, Katharine Viner.

The German leader said in opening the vote up for the first time to people as young as 16 in some countries, including Germany, it was "wrong" to presume "that they are completely different to their parents and grandparents" and would reject the far right.

He said that "reducing uncertainties and developing something you can

hope for" was essential for progressive politics. After supporting the Greens five years ago, Germans under 25 gave the far-right Alternative für Deutschland 16% of their vote - an 11-point rise - helping place the party second behind the opposition CDU-CSU conservatives. But he said it was misleading to suggest young people in general are flocking to the far right.

Scholz said that societies with less economic disparity were better for all - even the scions of multi-billionaires.

"You could tell the son of Elon Musk that he could have a better life in Germany ... because he does not have the need to live in a gated community," Scholz said. "We have to give a vision that works for everyone. So that it is a vision ... for an unskilled worker (at) an Amazon site ... the women working in the shop and also for the managers and the engineers and the skilled people." He said central to this was "the question of respect".

Scholz felt the world was experiencing "an extremely scary moment", but that the challenges also presented opportunities. He cited the example of Germany's textile industry in which the production "moved to cheap labour countries, but the machines were built in Germany".

He said full employment in Germany was also a scenario no one could have envisaged even a few years ago. "We have now a situation where nearly everyone is employed," he said. "For the next 10, 20, 30 years ... we will have a lack of labour as the problem."

He said the EU had to work with the countries of the global south to face up to mounting challenges to security and the international order.

"We have to react to all these strongmen and dictators coming up and we have to organise security ... but also making clear that we are strong enough and no one can conquer our territories. This is important," he said.

Scholz, 66, who has been German chancellor since 2021, described himself as a "technocratic manager". Despite recent poll setbacks, he said his future campaign message would match his party's winning formula from the last election. "My view is that the main question for all of us is hope," he said. "If you can hope for a better future, this is essential."

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**'We have
to give a
vision that
works for
everyone'**

Olaf Scholz
German
chancellor

 **Hanging out**

Cyclists in Guadalajara take a break during the local staging of the World Naked Bike Ride. The ride - this year celebrating its 20th anniversary - is a global protest movement with events in cities internationally, raising awareness of issues such as cyclists' road safety, reducing oil dependence and the climate crisis

ULISES RUIZ/AFP/GETTY







ISRAEL

Tensions rise on border as war looms

Doctors prepare for casualties, people flee their homes and apprehension hangs in the air as threat grows of conflict with Hezbollah

By Peter
Beaumont
and Quique
Kierszenbaum
NAHARIYA

Beneath the 800-bed Galilee medical centre in the northern Israeli city of Nahariya, treatment is being conducted in an underground complex.

About 7km from the border with Lebanon, a frontier visible from the hospital's car park, the doctors are aware that in the event of an escalating war their facility will be on the frontline.

A suite equipped with monitors and screens will act as the nerve centre in the event of a full-scale war between Israel and Hezbollah, a prospect that looms ever larger amid rising hostilities and exchanges of fire across the border.

In charge of the emergency preparations is Dr Tsvi Sheleg, an ophthalmologist whose unit was hit by a missile during the 2006 war. His planning reflects a crisis that has long been building to this point, he said. "We started preparing for this two-and-a-half years ago. We met with the northern and home front commanders where they described the number of missiles Hezbollah had acquired."

It is not only hospitals that have been preparing for a potential widening of the conflict.

Last week Israel's religious services minister, Michael Malkieli, in charge of burials in Israel, told the rightwing Channel 14 his office was preparing for "bigger things in the north", adding: "There are some things you don't say on air."

While the border has seen almost daily exchanges since 8 October, when Hezbollah began firing in support of Hamas, the threats have escalated sharply on both sides as the months have worn on.

Last week, senior Israeli generals announced they had signed off on a plan for an offensive to drive Hezbollah from the border, while the militant group's leader, Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, warned of a war "without rules or ceilings", threatening it could spread

even to Cyprus, which has hosted Israeli military exercises.

Those tensions were raised further still amid reports that US officials were warning Israel against launching a "blitzkrieg" offensive against Hezbollah, cautioning that its anti-missile defences could be overwhelmed. The consequences are already being felt. In Israel some 60,000 people have been displaced. Once busy places, like Kiryat Shmona, close to the border, have become ghost towns.

As the war in the north has become more perilous, the situation has become more politically toxic for the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, whose attention has been focused most on the fighting with Hamas in Gaza.

Despite frantic diplomatic efforts led by the US to de-escalate the conflict, public opinion is pushing for a military response with 60% of Israelis calling for an attack on Hezbollah "with full force", according to a recent poll by the Jewish People Policy Institute.

As the threat of war has grown, it has imposed itself ever deeper into Israel's heartland. Last Tuesday, Haifa's port was presented in a disturbing new perspective in footage captured by a Hezbollah surveillance drone flying overhead and then broadcast in an explicit threat to the city of 300,000.

Andre Suidan, who has run his wine importing business in Haifa for 30 years, said some of his longtime customers are choosing to leave Israel with their family. "I had someone come in just yesterday who is leaving. It's a tough decision but it's normal as you sense the bombing coming closer," he said.

But it is in sight of the border, however, that the conflict feels most real.

On the porch of a home in kibbutz Kabri, a group of residents gathered for an outdoor lunch to talk about the situation. There was a distant boom, then smoke rose from where the hills fall into the sea, the site of an army base on the border marked by its antennas. Soon afterwards the sound of outgoing Israeli artillery was audible.

Three generations of the men sitting at the table fought in Lebanon: in the early 1980s, in 1995 and in the last major war in 2006. "We have all been in Lebanon," said Adi Ceynan, the head of the kibbutz. "We know what it looks like on other side. We know one of the choices facing us is [to] be on the other side of the border."

Goni Harash was waiting to start his guard shift as a first responder, a rifle slung around his shoulder. Life has changed profoundly in the past eight months, he said. Like many, he left with his family in the immediate aftermath of Hamas's attack on 7 October and Hezbollah's entry into the conflict on 8 October. Most people, he said, have returned despite the proximity of the war and the threat of escalation.

"On the one hand people are happy to be here. You can't hide and people don't want to hide. But everything is really tense. All day you can hear bombs, sirens and alarms. My kids used to walk to school. Now they don't walk anywhere on their own."

While there are some disagreements among this kibbutz community, there is common ground in feeling abandoned by the Israeli government and being left to their fate.

"No one knows what's best," said Goni. "Is it best to see a major conflict or come to an agreement? It feels like the people who are supposed to know know least of all. The government needs to give us something."

PETER BEAUMONT IS A SENIOR GUARDIAN INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENT; QUIQUE KIERSZENBAUM IS A JERUSALEM-BASED JOURNALIST

◀ Smoke rises as rockets fired from Lebanon land near Kfar Szold in northern Israel

JALAA MARE/AFP/GETTY

'My kids used to walk to school. Now they don't walk anywhere on their own'

Goni Harash
Kibbutz Kabri

ANALYSIS
ISRAEL/LEBANON

Hostile acts Despite the talk of war both sides know the perils of all-out conflict

By Dan Sabbagh



A warning from Israel's foreign minister, Israel Katz, that a decision on "all-out war" with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon is coming soon is almost certainly an attempt at deterrence - not least because both sides understand how devastating full hostilities would be.

Hezbollah, an ally of Iran, is a more powerful adversary than Hamas. It is estimated to have between 30,000 and 50,000 fighters and a similar number in reserve, between 120,000 and 200,000 unguided missiles and rockets, plus attack and reconnaissance drones.

Assaf Orion, a former brigadier-general in the Israel Defense Forces and its chief of strategy between 2010 and 2015, estimates that Hezbollah has "10 times the arsenal of Hamas" and implies that any conflict would be a similar order of magnitude greater than the hostilities in Gaza after 7 October.

A key concern is the risk of miscalculation that leads to a



▲ Hezbollah fighters carry the coffin of senior commander Taleb Abdallah

BILAL HUSSEIN/AP

sudden conflict. Hezbollah and Israel have been trading blows since Hamas's October attack, with Hezbollah insisting it will not stop unless there is a ceasefire in Gaza. But as the campaign in the south reaches what the IDF says are its final stages, violence in the north has been stepping up.

An airstrike earlier this month killed Taleb Abdallah, the most senior Hezbollah commander to die in an attack since October, prompting the militant group to fire rockets into northern Israel in the heaviest barrages in eight months.

The last all-out war between the two, in 2006, escalated from an incident when Hezbollah guerrillas killed three IDF soldiers, injured two more and captured two others after a cross-border raid that was interpreted by Israel as an act of war. An air campaign into Lebanon failed to suppress rocket attacks and a brief ground invasion followed.

Already an estimated 155,000 civilians have been displaced on both sides of the border. Israel evacuated 60,000 citizens living within 5km, while a further 20,000 have abandoned homes farther away voluntarily. Another 75,000 have been forced to leave the villages of southern Lebanon.

Sarit Zehavi, the founder of Alma, an education centre that focuses on the security of Israel's northern border, said this position was unsustainable: "There is already a second front. Galilee [in northern Israel] is under daily attack from UAVs, rockets and missiles. The average now is 90 every week. There is already a war up there on a low scale. The question is how it will be solved."

Orion said a military solution would need "the whole of the IDF's available forces", allowing for a limited presence in Gaza and a security presence in the West Bank. An incursion would ask a lot of IDF troops fatigued fighting in the south.

Any conflict would prompt a diplomatic crisis, raising questions of whether Iran would seek to support Hezbollah and the spectre of a wider Middle East conflict the US has been desperate to avoid.

DAN SABBAGH IS THE GUARDIAN'S DEFENCE AND SECURITY EDITOR

CHILE

How Easter Island is swamped by deluge of plastic

Ocean currents are dumping tides of multinational rubbish on to the shores of one of the world's most remote habitats

By Jonathan Franklin
EASTER ISLAND

From a distance, the colourful beach at Ovahe seems a postcard-perfect mosaic of natural beauty. Craggy volcanic boulders, pockmarked from bubbling lava, jut from the sand, garnished by a necklace of pastel-coloured corals and seashells pounded to pieces by the wild, crashing surf.

As the waves pull back, however, another reality emerges. The sand holds few corals or shells. Instead, the high-tide mark is a carpet of plastics polished into an array of bleached Coca-Cola reds and Pepsi blues.

“Look at all this,” says Kina Paoa Kannegiesser, 22, using a kitchen sieve to scoop up bottle caps, shampoo bottle shards and disposable razors. The ocean rubbish is crammed into every nook and cranny along this remote beach on Easter Island, a 163 sq km speck of land.

About 3,700km west of central Chile, Easter Island (also known as Rapa Nui) is among the most remote spots on Earth - and among the most polluted. It is estimated that 50 times more plastic washes ashore on these

beaches than on the Chilean mainland, largely a result of the vast spiralling current known as the South Pacific gyre. This current acts like a funnel, sucking in plastic from as far away as the Galápagos Islands and New Zealand and, with every tide, depositing a wave of floating rubbish.

Picking through the sand, Paoa Kannegiesser holds an example of a coral colony forming on the lattice of a plastic fish bin discarded by the industrial fishing fleets that almost encircle this island as they chase dwindling schools of tuna. She collects fish bins by the dozen and lately has been finding coral that has fused with the debris to form an organic-plastic sandwich.

Seven years ago, when she was 15, Paoa Kannegiesser joined an environmental club at her Easter Island school as she sought to recycle beach plastic into art. She was hooked and now, twice a week, putters the 25km from one end of Easter Island to another in her mother's battered car to fill sacks with plastic pieces sifted from the sand and picked from between the rocks.

“The plastic is in the water for

▼ Kina Paoa Kannegiesser sorts plastic from seashells at Ovahe beach on Easter Island

Photographs by
Akira Franklin





such a long time that animals are attracted to it,” she says.

Paoa Kannegiesser takes all the plastic she collects at the beach - 10kg on an average mission - to her backyard workshop in the island’s capital, Hanga Roa, where she grinds it up and pours it into moulds. The debris is then melted into the shape of Easter Island’s iconic stone statues, or *moai*.

Each 10cm *moai* is made into a key chain, a fridge magnet or jewellery, which Paoa Kannegiesser sells to cruise-ship tourists, who thereby carry some plastic back off the island.

On the hills above Hanga Roa, the Orito recycling plant receives mountains of rubbish collected by civic cleanup patrols. During the Covid-19 pandemic, when tourism to the island shut down, hundreds of islanders spent months scouring the beaches as they removed about 11 tonnes of waste.

Plastic found at the recycling plant often reveals its origin. One panel carries the name of a Chile-based fishery, El Golfo. Other pieces, from the Wellington Trawling Company and United Fisheries, are from ships out of New Zealand. “We wrote letters telling them, ‘Your plastic is here. Why is your plastic here? What are you going to do?’ We never had any responses,” says Paoa Kannegiesser.

Workers at the city dump now grind the plastic into beads used to make multicoloured table tops and home furnishings. One inspired project built a music school for the island using 2,500 tyres, 40,000 glass bottles and 40,000 aluminium cans. Yet the mountain of rubbish grows. A study by the Catholic University of the North in Chile calculated that 4.4m pieces of rubbish a year - more than 500 pieces an hour - reach Easter Island’s shores.

“The Chilean government must talk to their municipalities to get them to stop dumping trash into their rivers,” says Felipe Tepano, a Rapa Nui elder who presides over the island’s powerful Council of the Sea. “If they dump it in the river, the river dumps it in the sea, and three or four years later, it arrives here.”

“My legacy to my grandchildren should be that they can still eat fish,” says Tepano, who, while gutting tuna a few weeks earlier, found a bewildering collection of plastics inside it. The plastic had clogged up the fish’s intestines. “The fish gets confused and eats the



plastic. Now it is dangerous to eat fish.”

At a plastics summit held on the island in April, Tepano put pressure on the United Nations Environmental Programme to finance a pilot project to collect ocean plastics. Who better than locals to collect floating plastic as they fished, argued Tepano, who proposed an incentive that would pay 2,000 pesos (\$2) for each kilogram of plastic recovered. But, as yet, he has received no funding.

April’s summit was part of an international effort to draft a global plastics treaty. This is being hammered out in a series of UN-sponsored meetings, with the latest round of the intergovernmental negotiating committee talks, known as INC-4, ending in Ottawa, Canada, in April. Many participants noted that the proposed text did not commit countries to even slow plastic production.

“The INC has once again failed to ask the most fundamental question to the success of the future treaty: how do we tackle the unsustainable production of plastics,” says Jacob Kean-Hammerson, an oceans campaigner with the London-based Environmental Investigation Agency.

Kean-Hammerson says pro-plastic delegates now “hold the talks hostage”. While the sponsors of the



▲ Petero Tepano, who served on the island’s governing council, sorts through washed up plastic

▼ Recovered plastic moulded into souvenirs

Washed up Easter Island’s waste problem

50
Number of times more waste that washes up on Easter Island than on the Chilean mainland

500
Number of pieces of rubbish that are calculated to reach the island every hour

4.4m
Number of pieces of rubbish that are believed to reach the island each year

global plastics treaty, including Peru and Rwanda, continue to gather members for the High Ambition Coalition, a force emerged opposing limits on plastics production. This group, which calls itself the Like-Minded Developing Countries - and whose members include China, Ecuador, India, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Venezuela and Vietnam - has fought efforts to control the growth of the plastics industry, he says.

Petero Tepano, who served on the Easter Island governing council, says the island is at the centre of several flows of plastics. “It is obvious that the microplastics come from Chile and Asia, but our fundamental problem is the factory fishing,” he says. “Look at the trash all around this island, it is from boats. You have buoys, oil barrels, ropes and nets - huge, huge nets.”

So many creatures are injured off Rapa Nui by floating nets that the Chilean government now runs a rehab centre on the island to save birds and animals maimed at sea. Easter Islanders are so accustomed to finding these “ghost nets” that locals decorate their homes with them.

The fishing fleet that dumps so much plastic offshore is estimated at 300 ships. Yet it is an invisible armada, rarely spotted except when a crew member suffers a medical emergency onboard a ship and needs treatment.

When these emergency landings occur, Easter Islanders use the opportunity to surveil the ship, chat with the crew and investigate their activities. At times, the foreigners are amiable and provide tours and access to the fish-holding tanks. It is a gruesome spectacle, says one man, who describes holds packed with different species, many caught illegally.

This deep-water trawling vacuums life from the Pacific, trapping turtles, suffocating dolphins and wastefully killing tonnes of sea life, dismissed as worthless “bycatch”.

Petero Tepano describes with indignation how one ship came to Hanga Roa, anchored offshore to unload an injured crew member, and then headed back to the open Pacific. Even before leaving the exclusion zone reserved for Chilean fishing boats, the crew had dropped their nets and begun scooping up sealife, leaving behind a trail of plastic rubbish.

“Sometimes,” says one fisher, “the locals go and throw rocks at them.”

JONATHAN FRANKLIN IS A JOURNALIST BASED IN CHILE



NEW ZEALAND



▲ Auckland is failing to attract people as record numbers leave New Zealand

CATHERINE IVILL/GETTY

Fears of skills shortage as departures hit new highs

By *Pete McKenzie* WELLINGTON

When New Zealand opened its borders after the pandemic, the departures began immediately. For Kirsty Frame, then a 24-year-old journalist for the country's national broadcaster in Wellington, the sense of loss was constant.

"It was goodbye dinner after goodbye dinner, leaving drinks after leaving drinks, and it started to take a toll."

For her, the city's beauty came from its people. "If what made Wellington so great as a place to live and work was my community, and I feel I don't have that here now and there's a lot less people my age, what do I want to do?"

She considered moving to Auckland, New Zealand's largest city, but heard it felt empty too. She mulled London, but Britain seemed too distant. Finally, in the middle of 2023, she moved to Melbourne.

The flow of departures from New Zealand has accelerated since then. Record numbers of people are leaving as cost-of-living pressures increase and residents grapple with limited job opportunities. Provisional figures from Statistics NZ show a net loss of 56,500 citizens in the year to April - up 12,000 from the previous record.

56.5k

Net loss of New Zealand citizens in the year up to April, according to Statistics NZ. This is an increase of 12,000 from the previous record

Separate figures indicated that half of those who left recently moved to Australia. Now, experts are worrying that a grim economic picture means departing Kiwis may not come back.

"We can't compete with the salaries in Australia," said David Cooper, director of immigration firm Malcolm Pacific. "Some people view that New Zealand has gone backwards, and so they're voting with their feet."

Frame said it "just felt like bad news after bad news" in New Zealand, and in Melbourne she found a higher-paying job and a flat with lower rent.

New Zealand has a tradition of young residents travelling for an overseas experience. According to Gareth Kiernan, chief forecaster at economics consultancy Infometrics, part of the reason the recent surge hit record levels is a backlog of people travelling abroad after delaying their plans due to travel restrictions and uncertainty amid the pandemic.

But much of the record flow out of New Zealand, according to Cooper and Kiernan, is also due to the growing attraction of Australia. As New Zealand inches out of a recent recession, many citizens believe that the cost of living is lower and salaries higher in Australia, Kiernan said, which might lead to more permanent shifts.

Cooper worries that outflow might worsen an already severe skills shortage in the country.

"The record numbers of Kiwis leaving are not the desperate. They're the young, skilled people," he said. "It's hard to attract the highly skilled people we need to replace the ones leaving."

Kiernan agrees. "If we're not able to keep people here because the economy isn't going well and the cost of living is too high, it does reflect pretty poorly on our economic situation."

For many young travellers, the pull of having children will probably be the driver to bring them home.

Frame, meanwhile, said: "What might bring me back is that feeling of missing my family, or a new chapter of my life starting. Or just feeling homesick for the country."

Frame said living in Melbourne means she does not need to return to New Zealand to get a taste of home.

"There are so many New Zealanders here, it's kind of ridiculous," Frame said. "Bumping into people from Wellington is almost an everyday event."

PETE MCKENZIE IS A WELLINGTON-BASED JOURNALIST



PAPUA NEW GUINEA

'Our hearts are heavy' Landslide leaves trail of anguish

Weeks after a tragedy that killed hundreds, community mourns amid cultural tensions over a bypass road

By *Alice Thomas* ENGA PROVINCE
Martha Louis MOROBE PROVINCE



‘The rocks are massive and the mud is so thick. It was like trying to move a mountain with a spoon’

In a remote village in northern Papua New Guinea’s Enga province, the community has set up a *haus krai*, a traditional mourning house. It is located about 200 metres from the landslide that buried people while they slept on 24 May. The house honours those killed in a tragedy that has affected thousands of people.

Earlier this month authorities brought an end to the official recovery operation. Estimates of the number killed vary widely and few bodies have been recovered. The UN initially said 670 villagers died, though locals say the number is lower.

Kopen Kongo, a police reservist, lives in Mulitaka, Enga province, where the disaster hit. He says many men, women and children remain buried under the debris. Kongo’s mother, two sons, and wife were trapped inside their house when the landslide struck, but he managed to dig them out alive. Many of his neighbours were not as lucky. The loss is deeply felt by all.

“The pain of losing so many in our community is unimaginable,” Kongo said. “We demand that the memories of our loved ones are respected.”

While the official search for bodies has ended, some relatives and families continue to look for their loved

ones. As they reckon with the losses, tensions have been stirred over how authorities have responded, while a road giving access to a nearby mine has raised objections for disrespecting cultural practices.

The Enga provincial disaster committee’s decision to put in a bypass road to reach the recently reopened mine, about 30km away in Porgera, has angered many surviving landowners in Yambali, one of the villages hit by the landslide, and others nearby.

According to Engan traditions, it is culturally inappropriate to disturb the ground where bodies are buried, and the community insists on proper burials before any road access is created.

▲ People in Enga province during rescue efforts after last month’s landslide

▼ The landslide in Yambali village, Enga province
EMMANUEL ERALIA/AFP



Kongo said residents demand respect for their deceased, and want a proper dialogue with the Enga provincial administration. He has also called for disaster support funds to be transparently managed and directed to the appropriate organisations.

“We need to ensure every bit of aid goes to those who need it most, without any mismanagement,” he added.

The Enga provincial disaster committee deputy chair, Kenneth Andrews, told local media there was an understanding between the communities of Yambali and Porgera to use the road. But many in the area affected by the landslide are not happy.

“People of Porgera are suffering because of this disaster as well and we need the Yambali people to understand and cooperate with authorities to rebuild lives of the living,” he said. A spokesperson for the Porgera mine did not respond to a request for comment.

Erickson Magalio, a resident of Yambali, lost his beloved sister in this catastrophe. Overwhelmed by grief, Magalio returned to the village from Wabag town, clinging to the fragile hope of recovering his sister’s body. The enormity of the task before him was almost unbearable.

“The rocks are massive, and the debris and mud are so thick and deep. Using our bare hands and shovels is simply not enough to reach the bodies,” Magalio said. “It was like trying to move a mountain with a spoon.”

Despite relentless efforts, the layers of rubble stood as an insurmountable barrier, and the ground beneath them remained in a constant state of flux.

About 30 people from nearby Nete Lyaim are thought to have been killed in the disaster. They were visiting Yambali when the landslide struck.

In Yambali, ongoing tremors threaten those who remain. A preliminary assessment of the landslide by geological experts indicated that it remains a high-risk area prone to further rock slides.

Rescue and relief operations have focused on immediate aid and long-term planning, hoping to prevent further conflicts and better prepare for the possibility of future disasters.

“Our hearts are heavy, but our resolve is strong,” Magalio said. “We will rebuild, and we will remember those we have lost.”

Alice Thomas and Martha Louis are Papua New Guinea-based journalists



NETHERLANDS

Heads up Road deaths prompt a rethink over bike helmets

By Senay Boztas AMSTERDAM

When 42-year-old Myrthe Boss gets on her bike to go shopping in the Dutch town of Ede, she pops on a helmet. This act, considered essential in many countries, marks out Boss as something of a radical in the Netherlands, where helmet-wearing is rare.

Now, however, faced with a rising number of traffic deaths linked in particular to older riders and ebikes, the Dutch government and provinces - not to mention neurologists such as Boss - are inviting cyclists to think again.

"I'm a huge fan of cycling, but it's important to protect ourselves," Boss said. "The brain is a very vulnerable organ with limited capacity to recover. If you fall from a bike and sustain a brain injury, this has long-term

consequences. And a large proportion of people who fall while cycling have brain injury."

She knows this all too well: in 2019, her mother died after a collision with a car at a roundabout. "A helmet doesn't prevent everything, but it does ensure there is less impact from the street on your head," Boss said. The number of cyclists seriously injured each year in the Netherlands has risen by 27% in the past decade, according to an injury prevention organisation, VeiligheidNL. The Dutch Institute for Road Safety Research (SWOV) found that if all cyclists wore helmets, there would be 85 fewer deaths annually. Meanwhile, the European Transport Safety Council says fatalities in older people and ebikers have set Dutch road safety "back in time 15 years".

Cycling is part of the country's cultural identity and 28% of journeys are made by bike. Child learners often wear helmets, but adults tend to be highly resistant.

In an attempt to change this mentality, the Dutch transport ministry plans to publish guidelines next month on voluntary helmet use. Provinces such as Gelderland and Utrecht are already doing their bit, running successful discount promotions, while takeaway companies such as Just Eat have made helmets mandatory for delivery cyclists. A recent editorial in the medical journal *Medisch Contact* had a simple headline: "Looks good on you, that skull fracture."

▲ A cyclist passes through ranks of parked bikes in Amsterdam

JOCHEN TACK/ALAMY

Even Fietsersbond, the Dutch cyclists' union, is changing its tone, while stressing that there is no excuse for reckless drivers or poor infrastructure. "We have the position that helmets don't prevent accidents but it can be a wise decision to wear one on a voluntary basis," said its director, Esther van Garderen. "Emphasising too much that you should wear a helmet would discourage people from cycling sometimes, though, and has the air of victim-blaming. I think it's coming slowly, although there's no such thing as a society with zero danger and we value our culture where you can cycle safe and free."

Denmark, which prides itself on an equally welcoming climate for cyclists, looks askance at its southern neighbours. Martin Hein, a transport ministry spokesperson, said that while helmets were not compulsory, many Danes had taken the hint after safe cycling campaigns by NGOs. "Because they're smart," he said. "We have very little other than our heads and if we don't take care of our heads we won't be able to provide for our families."

Although countries such as Australia and Sweden have strict helmet rules, the Danes were concerned that a law would put people off cycling and end up being worse for their health. The freedom-loving Dutch have a similar reluctance, according to Patrick Rugebregt, a spokesperson for the SWOV, which has studied a recent helmet campaign in Zeeland province. "Public opinion is the most significant obstacle," he said.

Bart Groothuijze, who runs the Castodian foundation promoting safer motorbiking, blames a misplaced sense of freedom and vanity. "My position is that if you don't wear a helmet riding a bike, a horse or whatever vehicle in which you are exposed to all kinds of elements, you are either stupid or you will become stupid after you crash," he said.

"On one hand the Dutch are quite vain, and secondly the Dutch don't like to be commanded: if someone says you have to do this, they will do the opposite. That's embedded in our collective DNA. But one good thing with ebikes is that the children of elderly people are saying to their parents: you should be wearing a helmet. It's becoming more normal."

SENAY BOZTAS WRITES ON EUROPE, PARTICULARLY THE NETHERLANDS AND BELGIUM

85

Number of lives the Dutch Institute for Road Safety Research says would be saved each year if the country's cyclists wore helmets

NIGERIA

How smooth operators reclaimed 'moonshine' palm spirit

By Eromo Egbejule BADAGRY

Since the pandemic, Lola Pedro has been spending a lot of time at an eco-tourist hamlet in Badagry town, on the outskirts of Lagos, surrounded by coconut and African apple trees next to chalets with showers open to the sky.

The hamlet's beach house serves as operations base and brainstorming centre for "Nigeria's first premium spirit", as the 42-year-old researcher, who was raised in London, describes the brand she co-founded in 2018.

"I found a level of affinity with the ethos of the space - a farm-to-table eco resort," she said. Inside the facility are maturation tanks and a giant neon logo for Pedro's Premium Ògógóró, which owes half its name to a Nigerian nickname for distilled palm sap, a west African favourite until its colonial-era ostracisation a century ago.

For centuries, the palm tree has been integral to communities on both sides of the Atlantic. Palm wine, its sap, has cultural, economic and spiritual significance across west Africa. The distilled version was once a phenomenon, said historian Ed Keazor, who drank it as an undergraduate in eastern Nigeria in the 1980s.

"From the late 19th century, it was brewed on a small scale but [blossomed] in the 1920s when Joseph Iso, a ship hand who had been in the United States during the Prohibition, came back to Nigeria, and with the skills he had learned from moonshine distilleries began teaching," he said.

Around that time, European colonial figures proscribed it as "illicit gin", citing lack of quality control. It became bootleg liquor consumed in unlabelled vessels at speakeasies and private functions or peddled by street vendors in rural areas.

But it has reappeared on shelves from London to Paris and New York - as Pedro's Ògógóró, Ghana's Aphro, Ivory Coast's Me N'zan koutoukou, Benin's Tambour Original Sodabi and more - thanks to local entrepreneurs.

"Ògógóró is not even gin," Pedro said about the "illicit gin" tag while uncorking a bottle of London Many, a champagne-type tippie. "It has such a negative reputation that we were like: how do we make ògógóró that out-smoothens your smoothest cognac?"

The journey to answering that question began in 2015 and took her to riverine communities such as Sapele, a small port town in the Niger delta.

Pedro and her co-founder Chibueze Akukwe, a 43-year-old financial

▼ Lola Pedro (in yellow hat, left) co-founded Pedro's Premium Ògógóró (right) in 2018

TOKETEMU
OHWOVORIOLE

'Ògógóró is a vehicle to talk about our identity'

Lola Pedro
Co-founder of Pedro's Premium Ògógóró

analyst, enlisted South African master distiller Roger Jorgensen, who also helped craft Kenya's Procera Gin.

When the distilled products arrive in Lagos, they are further refined at Pedro's mini-distillery on the Lagos mainland, and bottled with a logo inspired by Indigenous symbols that reference the six cardinal elements of the spirit's fabrication: water, the palm tree, drum, fire, machete and people.

The attention to detail pleases Bordeaux-based wine consultant Chinedu Rita Rosa, whose grandfather was from the delta. "The beautiful thing about it is the lingering taste in your mouth of the bouquet of tropical flavours of coconut and vanilla," she said.

Adetomi Aladekomo, editor of Nigerian food blog Eat.Drink.Lagos, believes the new-age spirits are catching on with new demographics. "Once it's not being sold in a sachet or on the roadside, we millennials are fine with drinking literally anything," she said.

The spirits have also sparked debates on decolonisation and ancestral heritage. On its website, the spirit Since the Time of John the Baptist says its name referencing the Biblical verse Matthew 11:12 is "a nod to Africa's interminable suffering".

A 45-minute boat ride across the lagoon connects the hamlet to the upscale district of Ikoyi while a road leads to Porto-Novo, the Beninese capital. Badagry and Porto-Novo were ports Europeans and natives used in trading palm oil and humans.

"Ògógóró is a vehicle to talk about our identity," said Pedro. *Observer*

EROMO EGBEJULE IS THE GUARDIAN'S WEST AFRICA CORRESPONDENT



BIOLOGY

By Jackson Ryan

The devil arrived at Andrew Walker's laboratory in a cardboard box. Its fluorescent green body, covered in a thicket of menacing spikes, was adorned at both ends with a pair of black horns.

For residents of north-east Queensland, this devil - scientific name *Comana monomorpha* - is known as the electric caterpillar. Its sting, typically received while tending to shrubs in the garden, is exceptionally painful.

The venom causes a nasty welt and a considerable rash that can last for a week. It is so bad that some victims have spent a night in an emergency department. Health professionals

treating afflicted people were seeing swelling, blood-filled boils and welts - but they could find nothing to help ease the pain.

According to one poster to a Townsville community group on Facebook, this "feels like the seven rings of hell". But where unlucky gardeners see an enemy, Walker sees a potential ally. "Caterpillars are my favourite venomous animal at the moment," he said.

Walker, a molecular entomologist at the University of Queensland's Institute for Molecular Bioscience, has characterised the venoms of some of the world's least-studied venomous animals, including centipedes,

assassin bugs and several caterpillars. Alongside Glenn King, an affable biochemist who leads the institute's "bugs and drugs" group, and a former colleague, Volker Herzig, the group has collected venom from more than 500 species, building an unrivalled collection of animal toxins.

"This is by far the biggest invertebrate venom library in the world - probably the biggest venom library in the world," King said.

Given that it includes venoms from Australian tarantulas, a Brazilian caterpillar and the lethal funnel-web spider, it might even be considered the deadliest library in the world. But researchers like King and Walker aren't

For unlucky victims, a caterpillar's sting 'feels like the seven rings of hell'. But scientists hope its toxin can be used to heal, not harm

Bugs, drugs and electric venom

The deadliest library in the world



The University of Queensland's Institute for Molecular Bioscience has studied the venom of animals such as the electric caterpillar (below) and the funnel-web spider (above)



interested in venoms' ability to kill. They want to use it to heal.

Venom is, in the simplest terms, a toxin delivered by one animal into another. But that definition diminishes toxins' complexity - they are composed of rich cocktails of molecules. More than 200,000 species on Earth are venomous and each has evolved their own set of biological weaponry to help them kill prey or, as with the caterpillar, defend against it.

Studying the molecules that make up venom, scientists have been able to develop compounds that can relieve chronic pain, treat diabetes and create eco-friendly insecticides. So far, six venom-derived therapeutics have been approved for use in humans.

Many venoms are adept at disrupting a piece of mammalian cellular machinery known as an ion channel. These channels are used for everything from breathing to muscle contraction and neural signalling.

Scientists like King and Walker use that quirk of nature to their advantage: By identifying key molecules in venom that interact with ion channels, they hope to uncover molecules that can target those channels, leading to the creation of targeted therapeutics.

A venom library supercharges this process, allowing researchers to screen hundreds of venoms at once and rapidly identify promising candidate molecules.

"We can apply [the library] to virtually any human disorder where we think an ion channel might be involved in the disease," King said.

On a warm Brisbane morning in early April, Walker led me through doubled-locked doors to the institute's insectary. There are signs on the walls outside about the dangers that could be lurking within; chief among the threats is the funnel-web spider.

Inside, the space is not much larger than an apartment bedroom. The sterile white and windowless laboratory is punctuated by three large grey cabinets - the kind you might find at a large hardware store. Walker opened one, plucked out a plastic lunchbox and lifted the lid. It wasn't a funnel-web, to my relief. It was Hector, the institute's "media-trained" rainforest scorpion. Walker placed it in my hands.

To date, snakes have provided the most useful venoms for human drugs and therapies. Scorpions, like Hector,

and spiders - which belong to the same class of animals - have long provided useful insights into venom, though no therapeutic compounds have been developed from them. The bugs and drugs group hopes to change that.

Using the venom library, the University of Queensland team, along with scientists from Monash University, have characterised the venom of a subspecies of funnel-web spider, discovering a peptide with potent physiological effects. Known as Hi1a, the tiny protein blocks a signalling pathway that orders cells to die when there's a lack of oxygen. When given to patients who have suffered a heart attack or stroke, Hi1a could protect against extensive, lasting damage.

In animal models, studies have suggested the molecule may have protective effects against heart attack. It's slated for preliminary human clinical trials in 2025.

As Hector rested calmly in my palm, Walker explained how his research has seen him move from neuroscience to studying silk proteins, and now to looking beyond scorpions and spiders.

"My idea was that, if you went to a different group of animals that had evolved venom independently, then you would start to see very different types of molecules," he said.

Walker's work with caterpillars is at a much earlier stage than the group's funnel-web studies. Spiders are generally much larger than caterpillars and produce a lot more venom. The typical yield after milking a spider can be measured in microlitres. Venom yield in caterpillars is measured in nanolitres - amounts barely perceptible in a test tube.

King says it would have been impossible to study this amount of venom just 20 years ago but technological advances have enabled researchers to identify peptides from minuscule volumes. This has resulted in a few surprises.

For one, it was predicted that caterpillar venoms would contain simple peptides and proteins - much like bee venoms - because they're used purely for defence. But Walker's studies have shown that the molecules produced in caterpillar toxins are much more complex than expected.

In the case of the asp caterpillar, a moth larva that looks like a toupee, Walker found evidence that it may have acquired its toxic capabilities via gene transfer with bacteria many



The asp caterpillar may have acquired toxic capabilities via gene transfer with bacteria millions of years ago

▲ Andrew Walker holds a golden orb spider

▼ Glenn King at the Institute for Molecular Bioscience

DAVID KELLY



millions of years ago. In research yet to be published, he suggests that the electric caterpillar may have undergone a similar process.

Both species contain venoms rich in molecules that are able to punch holes in a cell membrane, causing an attacking animal to feel pain.

These proteins present a possible path to new insecticides and therapeutics. Similar molecules have been used to protect crops from pests and some are being developed as a way of delivering drugs into cells. The electric caterpillar is unlikely to yield such impact, Walker stresses, but there are immediate benefits of understanding what makes up its venom - especially if you're a resident of north-east Queensland.

Electric caterpillar envenomation has been notoriously difficult to treat. Ice packs don't seem to work. An insect bite gel? Forget about it. Vinegar does nothing. Aspirin and paracetamol don't ease the pain.

Later in the afternoon of my visit, when I met King and Walker at the university cafe to talk about caterpillars, they devised a potential solution in real time. King noted that pain from jellyfish stings can be alleviated by heat and Walker's work has shown that peptides in asp caterpillar venom break down at higher temperatures. The electric caterpillar is similar, so they reasoned that a heat pack might be the best course of action for afflicted patients.

Walker didn't seem totally convinced but resolved to email a health worker in north-east Queensland who has been looking for answers. Perhaps he has finally found one.

JACKSON RYAN IS AN AUSTRALIAN SCIENCE WRITER

UNITED STATES

Evangelicals on crusade to return Trump to presidency

By David Smith WASHINGTON

God's army is on the march. And many of its foot soldiers are wearing Make America Great Again regalia, sensing that their unlikely standard-bearer, former US president Donald Trump, is once again close to the promised land.

"I do not believe that America can survive another four years of Joe Biden," Ralph Reed, founder and chair of the Faith & Freedom Coalition, told a gathering of the religious right in Washington last Friday. "I haven't felt this way since Jimmy Carter was president." The audience burst into knowing laughter.

Reed promised they would knock on 10m doors of Christian and conservative voters in every battleground

state, make 10m phone calls, send 25m text messages and put 30m voter guides in 113,000 churches, producing "the biggest turnout of Christian voters in American history".

With Trump running ahead of Biden in many swing state polls, religious right voters scent a historic opportunity to impose a radical agenda that could ban abortion nationwide, curb LGBTQ+ rights and blur the separation of church and state. At last Friday's conference, *speaker after speaker framed it as a righteous crusade* and the only way to resist a tide of liberal secularism sweeping America.

The couching of an Armageddon election, in which religious truth itself is at stake, with victory representing divine providence and defeat spelling total catastrophe, was crystallised by Monica Crowley, a rightwing political commentator and former assistant secretary of the treasury.

She described the election as a "hinge moment" comparable to the American revolution, American civil war, second world war and September 11 terrorist attacks.

Notably, little was said by the dozen main stage speakers about abortion, a live political grenade for which Republicans have struggled to find a coherent message since the supreme court overturned the landmark Roe v Wade precedent two years ago.

Religious conservatives' pact with Trump appears to be holding. Some were sceptical about the thrice-married reality TV star when he first

Radical agenda Ben Carson, a former housing secretary in Trump's first term, praised Republican-dominated Louisiana for becoming the first state to require that the Ten Commandments be displayed in every government school classroom. He also warned of a 60-year communist project to change America by taking over schools, churches and Hollywood and removing God from the public square.

▼ Then president Donald Trump joins evangelical Christians in prayer in 2020

TOM BRENNER/REUTERS

ran for president in 2016 but the concerns were assuaged by his running mate, born-again evangelical Christian Mike Pence, and by a first term that saw him shift the judiciary to the right.

Not even Trump's conviction in New York last month on 34 felony counts in a trial involving hush-money payments to an adult film star has shaken his grip on this constituency. Many who complain that their faith is under siege regard him as a blunt instrument with which to fight back against the radical left. The presumptive Republican nominee has exploited this totemic status. Earlier this year, he launched his own brand of Bible, selling for \$59.99 each. During the trial, he shared social media posts comparing himself to Jesus Christ.

At last Friday's Road to Majority policy conference, Stephen Sandrelli, 60, posed with a picture of the US representative Elise Stefanik against an Oval Office backdrop. "First of all, we've got to deport millions - at least 15 million people," he said of a second Trump term. "The Democrats are terrorists. They hate our nation. They hate humankind." Sandrelli, a former Democrat and federal government officer from Fitchburg, Massachusetts, added: "Anybody who supports abortion is supporting murder."

But sensing political danger, Trump has refused to endorse a national abortion ban. Some here felt let down. Wearing a red Maga cap, Thomas Dinkel, 16, who goes to a school in Morgantown, West Virginia, said: "I'm going to be honest with you: as a pro-life Christian, it hurts. I see why he and a lot of other national Republicans are doing it. They're slowly backing away from the issue. It's ruffled some feathers."

But Dinkel is supporting Trump and is willing to overlook his moral shortcomings, saying: "He says that he's repented of his sins, and I'm called to forgive Trump."

Dorothy Harpe, an African American woman who is retired from a church in Atlanta, Georgia, was wearing a Maga cap and badge that said: "Trump was right!" The 74-year-old said: "He tells the truth. People don't want to believe him, they think he always doing something wrong, but he's not. He's innocent of all the bogus charges they brought against him. God knows every man's heart, and I believe he is a Christian." *Observer*

DAVID SMITH IS THE GUARDIAN'S WASHINGTON DC BUREAU CHIEF





ANALYSIS
WIKILEAKS

Long shadow Assange's release is not a clear victory for the press

By Julian Borger WASHINGTON



The release from a UK prison of Julian Assange is a victory for him and his many supporters around the world, but not necessarily a clear win for the principle underlying his defence, the freedom of the press.

Assange, 52, agreed to plead guilty to a single criminal count of conspiring to obtain and disclose classified US national defence documents, according to filings in the US district court for the Northern Mariana Islands.

The full details of the deal between Assange and US authorities that led to his release were not immediately made public, but the charges, for which he was expected to be sentenced to time served,

were drawn from the 1917 Espionage Act, for “conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified information related to the national defense of the United States”.

So although the WikiLeaks founder was expected to walk free from the US district court in Saipan after this week’s hearing, the Espionage Act will still hang over the heads of journalists reporting on national security issues, not just in the US. Assange himself is an Australian, not a US citizen.

US prosecutors argued that Assange was not a proper journalist, but a hacker and an activist with his own agenda, who endangered the lives of US sources and contacts, so the Espionage Act could be applied without harming press freedom.

But press and civil liberties advocates took the view that it was irrelevant how Assange was defined. What he was accused of, “obtaining and disseminating classified information”, is what national security journalists do for a living.

The revelations WikiLeaks published about the Iraq and Afghan wars in 2010, leaked to the organisation by an army intelligence analyst, Chelsea Manning, brought to light possible human rights abuses by the US military in those wars, among other things. They were published by the Guardian and other news organisations on the grounds there was a strong public interest in those secrets being brought to light.

When it took office in 2021, the Biden administration had the option of dropping the Espionage Act charges brought by its predecessor, the Trump presidency. After all, the justice department under Barack Obama had chosen not to pursue them because of concerns for the implications for journalism.

US prosecutors under Biden chose, however, to pursue the Trump charges and fought to extradite Assange from the UK. They had the option of making a plea deal based on other charges, such as getting Assange to plead guilty to the misdemeanour of mishandling classified documents, the deal reportedly floated in March with the encouragement of the Australian government. Or they could have opted for a hacking conspiracy charge, which would not have had the same spillover implications for journalism.

By all accounts, Joe Biden did not even want Assange to be brought to the US. Assange’s extradition to face trial would have been a damaging distraction for the struggling president in an election year, further alienating progressives and libertarians.

Biden said in April that he was considering an Australian request to drop the prosecution. But the justice department seems to have stuck to its guns and the prosecutors pressed ahead, only agreeing to a plea deal after Assange won the right last month to appeal against his extradition in the high court in London. Even then, the justice department stuck to its insistence on using Espionage Act charges.

“A plea deal would avert the worst-case scenario for press freedom, but this deal contemplates that Assange will have served five years in prison for activities that journalists engage in every day,” Jameel Jaffer, executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University, said.

“It will cast a long shadow over the most important kinds of journalism, not just in this country but around the world.”

JULIAN BORGER IS THE GUARDIAN’S WORLD AFFAIRS EDITOR

◀ A placard in support of Julian Assange outside the high court in London in May

KIN CHEUNG/AP

“Assange’s extradition would have been damaging for the struggling president in an election year.”

‘You asked me questions that I’ve never asked myself. That may seem funny, but part of being Keir is just ploughing on’
The man likely to be Britain’s next PM

By Charlotte Edwardes

WHAT ABOUT A QUICKFIRE ROUND, I say to Keir Starmer, who is pushed for time on the campaign trail, a few snapshots to help glimpse the man likely to be PM? Starmer is nodding. He’s keen to be helpful, keen to be a sport, although a little unsure of this magazine profile business and the need to talk about feelings. We are in the green room, all mirrors and concrete, backstage at Labour’s Scottish launch in Inverclyde, and unless I’m mistaken he still has on a layer of foundation. Ready? He folds his arms across his chest. “Yes, by all means.” 



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UT THEN HE CAN'T REALLY SAY if he's strictly an optimist or a pessimist and, no, doesn't know if he's an extrovert or an introvert, either. "I've never really thought about it. I don't know what that tells you." He doesn't know what he dreamed last night - or ever: "I don't dream." Just hits the pillow at 11 and - "bang" - is out till around 5. He doesn't have a favourite novel or poem, wasn't scared of anything as a child. "Nothing. No phobias." Hmmm, this is harder than I thought. Quickfire is perhaps not his format.

He will be more relaxed and expansive in our second interview a week later when, sun-glazed from the Normandy beach, he will tell me about the D-day commemorations where he stayed the whole day and Rishi Sunak did not. Like Gordon Brown's mutter of "bigoted woman", Theresa May's dementia tax, Richard Nixon's sweaty top lip, the D-day debacle will mark a shift in the campaign. Starmer will lean back on his office sofa, put his hands behind his head and reveal his shirt underarms - impressively dry for a Friday of meltdown news. He will say he's thought about my questions and has something to tell me.

But a week is an eternity in politics and so today, in Scotland, he's still cautious of tripwire headlines. Who can blame him? At 20 points ahead with a hostile media, he has everything to lose. So, he tiptoes around the question of Downing Street, caveats any mention with "if we get that far"; "we don't want to get ahead of ourselves".

In the weeks that I tail Starmer, I observe him give speeches, meet voters, work sleeves rolled up on the train. I see him chuckle, drop the F-bomb, crack jokes about Ed Balls. His suits get sharper; he acquires new specs; more clay is swept through the concrete hair. I notice that when he's cross, his ears redden. Stressed, he has a face like a slammed front door. The snap election explodes plans for me to accompany him to his favourite tandoori, to witness the blow as Arsenal finish the season as runners-up. Winning is everything for Starmer, those close to him say. In football, in life, in politics.

And unless the nation has colluded in one giant lie to opinion pollsters, Labour is set to take power with a majority so zinging, it will eclipse even Tony Blair's. A victory so epic that Tories have been begging voters not to deliver what Grant Shapps calls a "supermajority" and install what the Daily Mail fear is a "one-party socialist state".

What's odd, then, is that Starmer's personal ratings look good only next to lame duck Sunak's. An Ipsos poll shows 49% of voters don't know what he stands for. He shrugs off backing Jeremy Corbyn, saying he never thought his predecessor could win. At Labour's manifesto launch, he declared: "If you take nothing else away from today, let it be this. We are pro-business and pro-worker, the party of wealth creation." Income taxes won't go up, he'll be the private sector's best friend. A stance to garner support, sure, but complicated if you're trying to tell a story about him; to plot the narrative arc of the last five years.

"I am who I am, I know what I am," he has said, rejecting comparisons with former leaders. Who he is is easy enough: a barrister who specialised in human rights law, king's counsel, former director of UK public prosecutions (for which he earned a knighthood). "Some people will say you are boring and stiff," journalist Beth Rigby, who has more guts than I do, told him on the Sky News debate. "Cheers," he laughed in unflustered response, because if there's one thing Starmer is not afraid of, it's letting his inner Clement Attlee shine through. I've

heard people push the thesis of why boring is good, much needed in this post-truth, post-Johnson, deeply unserious apocalyptic bin-fire period of British political history. Boring is a cool drink after a long crawl through the desert in a heatwave. Boring is the gold standard when selfless political service, civility and honesty have faced an extinction-level event in Britain.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO LABOUR HQ on a sticky London afternoon a week later. I'm led past a ticking countdown clock - "Polls open in *26* days" - past the hive of hot desks and happy workers in white trainers and open-neck shirts, who would surely be ID-ed in the pub. Past the lush foliage and surprising number of union flags and delivered to Starmer's office, where two mugs of tea are set down on the table. He's in one of his identical Charles Tyrwhitt suits, another of his identical shirts. "You asked me questions that I've never asked myself," he says of the last time we met. "That may seem funny, [but] part of being Keir" - he sometimes talks about himself in the third person - "is just ploughing on. Knowing what I'm doing, knowing where I've got to go, without allowing myself time to stop and have a discussion with myself. I've just got this thing about keeping going."

I'm guessing he never did therapy. "No, no," he says. "No." Then "No" again in a lower tone bordering on horror. He's not saying this is the only way to live, it's just that "I am self-aware enough not to go into side alleys to have a chat with myself about these things."

I ask what he gleans from all the political biography he reads, and he says thoughts "about leadership". Good leadership means consulting with his team, even when he thinks he knows best, and good leadership means the team feel comfortable rebutting his view. "Steph, Tom" - he gestures to his advisers sitting in the room - "can agree or disagree. I've said to the staff here many times, and this really matters to me: I want respect, but I don't want deference." Deference is massive failure of leadership, he argues, "where you create the conditions in

Long wait

Keir Starmer photographed at Labour's HQ in London this month

which other people don't feel that they can challenge you. The best decisions I've made in my life were those held up to the light and that survived scrutiny. The worst were when nobody said 'boo'."

There's no danger of deference when he hangs up his jacket at his redbrick home in Kentish Town. Here, there's no shadow cabinet, no advisers, just the three members of his family - his wife, Victoria, their teenage son and daughter. He supplies a typical example of how they respond to his role: when he came back named the Spectator's politician of the year in 2022, he sat on the sofa and passed the award to his son. "He didn't even look up from the telly. He took it, said, 'How did you blag that, then?' and passed it back.

"So it's not a case of walking through the door and minutes of blissful, 'Oh, how was your day?' or, 'Recount the brilliant things that happened today.' It's straight into a row [about the takeaway], one of them wants a pizza, one wants something else. And then there's an argument about what we had last week, and whose decision we went with." Calm is restored by the sitcom Friday Night Dinner, which he likes, though "it's pretty formulaic". It gives him joy, he says, to sit down together. "Some of the humour is a bit close to the bone - they are only 13 and 15 - and they'll say, 'Did they just say that?'"

He's coy about home life, perhaps a little guilty. So desperate is he to protect his kids, he won't say their names aloud - just "my boy" and "my girl". This gives them freedom to walk back from their local schools, hang with friends, get up to "all sorts without fanfare or attention". He says it's "difficult" at times. Children's shoes were placed by protesters in his front garden to symbolise the death toll in Gaza. Even simple things: looking out of their windows, they see journalists in the street. "That affects them. I am acutely aware." He says it would be different if they were older or much younger, but "these are formative years. We keep life as ordinary and unchanged as possible."



‘The emotional space was quite limited growing up at home ... and therefore wasn’t something I was familiar with growing up’

Has he broached how their lives will change should they win? “A bit. We believe in crossing every bridge as we get to it and therefore having great long conversations about the change, Vic and I decided that isn’t [the best way].” He has taken “bits” of advice from Gordon Brown and Tony Blair, “but every child is going to experience it differently ... Our approach is to make it [as smooth as possible]. If we get that far.”

Lately, the priority at home has been his son’s GCSE school exams. Starmer tries not to add to this tension. “It’s hard, if I’m honest. When there’s a lot going on, I’m still in the zone. Sometimes I’m sort of half out of the conversation, which they notice straight away. They’ll say, ‘You’re not really listening, are you, Dad?’ Our boy says, ‘What did I just say?’” He lights up talking about the joy he feels when his son calls to say an exam went well. “That’s like - ” he does a little fist pump. “That’s a proud moment [when] he thinks he’s done his best.” Then he worries he’s talked too much about his son and his daughter will be cross. Each “thinks the other is the favourite”.

Of course, the story about Starmer’s father Rodney “the toolmaker” and his “no frills” parenting has been rehearsed. The repeated details about his childhood in a pebbledash semi in Oxted, Surrey, seemed like a forced effort to give his political story shape. But it *is* the root of his emotional clumsiness, Starmer insists. “The emotional space was quite limited at home ... and therefore wasn’t something I was familiar with growing up.” He pauses, frowns, then corrects himself because actually, “my sister says she does express herself and her emotions more than I do. And so partly it must have been that emotional space, but partly it’s *me*. How I reacted to it.”

By contrast his mother Jo was boundless warmth, despite crippling Still’s disease, a rare type of inflammatory arthritis. An abiding memory is returning from school to find her making jam sandwiches and listening to Jim Reeves. He could confide in her about anything - “relationships and splitting up, all that stuff, which is so acute when you’re younger. She was wise counsel.” There are flashes of both parents in him, visible at different times in the debates, but perhaps most stark when an audience member called him “a political robot” and he froze, appearing not to know whether to stay shut down or to open up.

Jo’s illness - she was frequently rushed to ICU - meant the usual fits of adolescent rebellion were off-limits to the four Starmer children. He gives this as one example: their annual holiday was to a remote cottage in the Lake District, the one place their mother really loved. “There wasn’t space for us to say, ‘Hang on, what about going to the seaside?’” Actually, there wasn’t much physical space at home, either. Starmer shared bunk beds with his brother Nick in a cramped bedroom until he went to university aged 18 - by which time, he adds, the fun of bunk beds had long “worn off”. He stands to mark out how small it was, as if pacing round a cell. He also shows me an approximation of the limited surface area for his posters of Debbie Harry and pages from the football magazine *Shoot!*. But it wasn’t all bad: he and his three siblings each had a dog. So he rose at 5.45am on weekdays both to walk his red setter Percy and to practise his flute.

LATER, WHEN HE IS IN FULL FLOW about how “it was lovely to have a dog”, he halts, suddenly. “But you mustn’t put this in,” he says. “Because my daughter has launched a campaign to get a dog, so I’d better not wax lyrical about [it]. I can just see this being quoted back.”

His first memory, aged four, was his dad bringing home a blue Ford Cortina. “We’d never had a car. I spent my whole time cleaning it as it sat [on the drive] outside our house.” I suspect he was the family’s golden child - his siblings nicknamed him “Superboy” - but he rejects this outright. “I wasn’t the favourite because my mum was quite careful with that. But I did feel slightly separated because the other three went to the comprehensive school and I went to [Reigate] grammar school and the Guildhall School of Music on Saturdays.” One outlet was sport: football three times a week, athletics, rugby, cross-country. “We had a big field behind our house where we would



go and play, build camps and things. There was freedom, I suppose, and that was great.” (Here, he shoehorns in a political message: “You know, because I live in Kentish Town, people don’t appreciate how rural my upbringing was. But I’ve a lifelong love of countryside.”)

It was on the top deck of the bus to school that frustrations were aired and arguments came to blows. He is named after the founder of the Labour party and told Desert Island Discs: “You can think for yourself of all the things that rhyme with Keir.” One school friend told his biographer, Tom Baldwin, that young Starmer was “rough and ready. Quite macho ... a bit of a wild man without any of that lawyerly restraint you see today.” I ask when he last physically lashed out at someone. “On a football pitch,” he says instantly, “a few years ago.” When he steps on the pitch, there’s nothing else on his mind. “I can’t be thinking about work. All I’m thinking about is football. Totally all in. That is a release. That’s why I still really enjoy playing.” It’s the only place he feels frustrated about the ageing process. “But also,” he says with emphasis, “I am *still on the pitch*.” Not bad for 61. He says whenever he describes his position - a box-to-box midfielder - “the guys I play football with text me and say, ‘Maybe 20 years ago, mate.’”

I AM NOT SURE HOW MUCH HIS IMAGE HAS CHANGED since it was moulded at Leeds university. He says he rocked up there in a woolly jumper with Ray Clemence hair, “Boomtown Rats under one arm, Status Quo under the other”. John Murray, his lifelong friend since, saw him striding across campus and thought: “‘There’s work to be done on this guy.’ [He] stripped me down, got my hair cut, got me into independent music and turned me into a certainly more hip 18- or 19-year-old than I was when I arrived.” There are still hints of that white working-class lad. Besides the Max Headroom hair (which has its own Instagram), he uses terms like “naff”, “cheers”, “mate”. His music tastes are lodged in the mid-80s - Aztec Camera, Orange Juice - and for a long while it seemed he couldn’t be photographed without a beer.

He had hoped to study politics at Leeds, but his parents insisted on law (he went on to do a postgrad at Oxford). Arguably, it was procedure and law that gave him the enthusiasm for details that is on display right now as he starts sketching a diagram of a two-way street in Hull in the 90s in answer to the question: have you ever got a parking ticket? “So, if you’re like this, you’re driving up that way or this way, you’re supposed to park facing that way ...” He hasn’t had a speeding ticket since he started working as an adviser to the newly established police board in Northern Ireland. “It occurred to me that picking up tickets for breaking driving laws wasn’t a good idea,” he says, adding: “I’m not trying to be goody two-shoes.” It is this extreme caution, I feel, that made Helen Fielding, author of *Bridget Jones* - whose fictional Mr Darcy was supposed to be based on Starmer - cry out: “Come on, Keir, loosen your tie, ruffle your hair.” It’s also why the story of how a conman called Paul Bint, who stole his identity to answer lonely hearts ads, is extra funny. Bint conducted two long-term affairs as “Keir Starmer, DPP”, even stealing jewellery from one girlfriend to give to the other. When it came to court, one of the women said she was surprised his behaviour “wasn’t very DPP-like”.

In the life of the real Keir Starmer, there are many meaningful acts of a person who has willingly devoted himself to public service. He worked pro bono to advise two penniless climate activists sued by McDonald’s for handing out leaflets outside their restaurants, which became the famous *McLibel* case. “I didn’t know I was embarking on a 10-year exercise with them. I thought it was chilling for freedom of expression. But [advising] these two individuals against a giant corporation in this David and Goliath battle was an incredible experience.” He also acted for the miners’ unions, in relation to pit closures and an injury called vibration white finger. For a long time it was not properly diagnosed, leaving thousands without compensation until “we gathered all the experts together in a massive case and won it”. (More than £500m [\$630m] has been paid out to those with the condition.)

First class

Starmer at his graduation in Leeds in 1985 with his parents Rodney and Jo

KEIR STARMER



Home life

With his wife Victoria at the 2023 Labour party conference

ANTHONY DEVLIN/
BLOOMBERG/GETTY



Centre forward

Playing football for his team Homerton Academicals

LABOUR PARTY



‘Young Starmer was rough and ready. Quite macho ... a bit of a wild man without any of that lawyerly restraint you see today’

On the trail

Campaigning with Rachel Reeves and Angela Rayner

PETER NICHOLLS/GETTY



He says he copes with stress “by being practical, by doing things” – ploughing on, in other words. For the record, his belated response to my earlier question is that he is an optimist, but only in the “nuts-and-bolts sense” of wanting to change things for the better. And, thinking about it, he’s “a bit of both” on the extrovert/introvert scale.

STARMER HAD A NUMBER OF LONG RELATIONSHIPS before he met Victoria Alexander. She was a solicitor, he the senior barrister checking documents she’d sent over were accurate. “This schedule, is it any good? Is it absolutely accurate?” he barked down the phone. “Who the fuck does he think he is?” he heard her say as she hung up. They met again at a work dinner, and for their first date he asked her to go to the pub with him in Camden Town. Apparently his son has said this is the least romantic location imaginable, but Victoria said: “At least he walked me to the bus stop afterwards.” He spontaneously proposed in Greece just months later. “Won’t we need a ring, Keir?” she responded. For once he wasn’t prepared.

I’m told by one of her friends that Victoria is very funny but refuses to be “a show pony” so won’t give interviews or pose for a shoot. She grew up in north London, the daughter of Bernard, an Ashkenazi Jew, and Barbara, who converted to Judaism. When I suggest that makes Victoria Jewish, and his children, too, Starmer demurs. “No, no, they’re not Jewish for reasons I won’t bore you with. Bernard’s dad’s family didn’t accept that. So it – ” he waves a hand to suggest it’s not up for discussion. The family occasionally attend a liberal synagogue. Their Jewish heritage is important, he says. “And we’re very keen for the children to know about it, to understand it. Half of the family are Jewish, they’re either here or in Israel.” No one was directly affected by 7 October. “Thank God,” he says. But they’ve been affected by the war. “No doubt about that.”

I ask, because Victoria works in occupational health in the NHS, what she says by way of complaint when she comes home frayed after a day in the broken system? “There is a lot of frustration that nothing’s working and it takes for ever to get anything done. It’s like wading through syrup or glue. They’ve a spirit in her team – probably across all the NHS – of ‘Don’t complain, just get on with it’, while knowing it’s not what it should be.”

In the first televised debate, he insisted that he would never go private. Never, *ever* I push him now, in no circumstances? “What was put to me is: if you’re on the waiting list, would you? The answer is no. I had a meniscus done so I’ve been on that waiting list myself. It took months. And meant that I couldn’t play football. So there was a serious issue for Keir Starmer” – that third person again – “but it didn’t occur to me for a minute to jump the queue. I waited my turn. I don’t find that odd. I was then asked: what about an acute [situation]? Well, I’d go to the NHS. If there is one place to go to if you are in a life-threatening situation, it is the NHS. The private hospitals refer to the NHS. For all the faults, all the stresses and strains described in Vic’s world, when it comes to acute crisis, they are fantastic.”

On the subject of the debates, I ask about his accusation that Sunak was a “liar” (for saying a Labour government would increase the tax burden on each household by £2,000). Would he have used that word in politics before Boris Johnson was PM? “No. I’m not in the business of bandying insults around. But it was depressing when you’re trying to have a national debate about the issues of the day. You can argue robustly about a policy difference, but you can’t debate if the basis is actually a lie.” So why did he not push back more quickly? He says he wishes someone would get the tape, because at least that would give him some satisfaction of being able to show that he did say to Julie Etchingham that he wanted to come back on that point. “But she said, ‘No. We’ll come back to this later.’ I had a decision: do I shout over her? Or address it later? So I waited. And we didn’t come back to it till later on. I knew straight away I had to rebut it, and I tried to.”

I ask how he felt about Johnson insulting him in the Commons,

resorting to name-calling (“human bollard” or “Sir Beer Korma”). “I couldn’t care less what he called me. I’m not saying I have great insight, but I felt his character would bring him down. I thought, there’s a guy who is detached from the truth. Whether he’s lying or not, it doesn’t matter to him.” Starmer lays out the intentional way he set a trap for Johnson. “When I first asked him, ‘Did you apply all the rules?’ I hadn’t seen the video of Allegra [Stratton, Johnson’s director of strategic communications]. But he was told about her laughing in response to being asked, ‘What do we say about the parties?’ So I said [to my team], ‘I think there’s something here. Let’s get him on record. Because his instinct will be to lie.’ It was a thread that we pulled over months. I was less bothered by what he was saying to me than trying to be forensic and getting him on the record. It paid dividends in the end. He had to leave parliament – because he’d lied.”



I CAN’T THINK OF A MORE EXPLICIT EXAMPLE of his foresight and ruthlessness. Is he more ruthless than Blair? “I don’t know,” he says. “I’ve never thought about it.” (I ask the same of a senior Labour insider who replies simply: “Yes.”) Perhaps Johnson should have been put on warning when Starmer suspended Jeremy Corbyn. He might also have observed how Starmer took total control of Labour’s ruling NEC and purged possible opponents on the hard left. Lately the NEC has remade the election candidates list in his image and dumped firebrands such as Faiza Shaheen.

Because it’s fresh the day I see him, Starmer wants to talk about D-day. He wants to tell me that he walked down to the beach and tried to contemplate the horror experienced by these young soldiers, not much older than his children. And, yes, he was upset by the “insult” to veterans. But it’s also Sunak’s big political choice that offends him.

“[It] was the birth of the postwar European institutions that said, ‘We’ve won this together, we need to stick together.’ Sunak can’t honour the Brits, then bugger off. It’s much deeper than just a judgment error. This said something about turning inwards, the sense that it doesn’t matter what you do on the international stage any more.”

I remind him that on the stage at the Hay festival in 2019, he said of Brexit: “My big, big fear was that we might turn in on ourselves and become a country that didn’t any more want to play our part on the international stage, didn’t think international obligations and standards mattered any more.” He laughs. “Blimey, I was ahead of myself. Therein lies the story of the last five years. That’s why the election has to be a reset. If we win it,” he says. “No vote has been cast!”

I ask whether the family will live in No 10 in the traditional way. “We had a discussion when [the kids] were born. How did we want to bring them up? And we settled on ‘happy and confident’. And that’s always what we’re asking ourselves: are they happy? Are they confident? So we’re not pushing them to do things because we’ve got a set prescribed route or career path for them. We want them to be happy and confident, and obviously to do as well as they possibly can. We’re not the parents who are driving them to do this, or exposing them. Wherever we will live, we’ll live together as family, of course. And that will be Downing Street if we” – touch wood – “get it over the line. But Vic and I are very much taking things as they come.” ●

CHARLOTTE EDWARDES IS A FEATURE WRITER FOR THE GUARDIAN

Sons of the guns





Illustration by
ANNA KÖVECSES

Can children born into Italy's mafia families be saved from lives of crime? One judge is helping them to establish new lives in a bid to break the cycle

By Clare Longrigg

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BEFORE DAWN ON A JUNE MORNING in 2010, police burst through the high security gates of a palazzo belonging to a notable mafia family on the edge of a small town in Calabria. As agents swarmed through the building, turning the place over, family members moved frantically to hide any evidence. Maria, the family's 12-year-old daughter, was given a page ripped from a notebook. It was a list of debts owing. She was told to hide it: "Put it in your knickers, they won't touch you." Her brother Cosimo, 14, watched in helpless rage as his father, mother, even his grandmother, were handcuffed and led out to the waiting police cars.

After the arrests, Cosimo was the only male family member outside prison, and it became his responsibility to collect money for the lawyers' fees. He was a baby boss with his own driver, visiting local businesses who were on the family's books, and demanding payment with menaces. "He was recognised as the boss," says journalist Dario Cirrincione. "If he went to a bar in the village, older men would get up to greet him. People waited on him, drove him around, did anything he needed. This sort of treatment turns these kids into little kings."

The Calabrian mafia, the 'Ndrangheta, is based on family groups in small towns along the coastline of Italy's toe. The area is littered with half-built factories, projects paid for by state development funds and abandoned once the 'Ndrangheta got its hands on the money. Since taking control of the port at Gioia Tauro on the west coast, the organisation has become one of the biggest importers of cocaine to Europe. The authorities have made sweeping arrests over the past decade, and staged a series of maxi trials in reinforced bunkers, involving hundreds of defendants. But the family structure means the organisation is hard to dismantle. As fathers and grandfathers are serving life sentences, many in high-security jails, the younger members are starting their criminal careers ever earlier.

For two years, Cosimo only saw his father behind a glass screen in a high-security prison. His father told him he had to "grow", to be a man. He was responsible for his sister. If Maria went out, he would send his thugs to check where she went and who she saw. He was living like a gangster, out all night, fighting, getting home at dawn. "People expected me to be forceful," he said later in an interview with Italian TV. "They expected me to behave badly. I had all the hunger for power of a kid who feels he is invincible."

Cosimo was chasing one businessman for €5,000 (\$5,300). He waited outside the school gates for the man's son, scared the boy and pushed him around. In spite of the very real threat of reprisals, the man reported the incident. The police were aware of Cosimo's delinquent behaviour: he had visited other businesses, accompanied by his heavies, demanding money. He had taken a selfie



in a balaclava as he robbed a tobacconist at gunpoint. He had filmed a youth getting beaten up, laughing as he urged the victim, who was on the floor, bleeding and vomiting, to fight back. But threatening children was a step too far. Cosimo was arrested.

In late 2013, Cosimo's case file landed on the desk of judge Roberto Di Bella at the youth court in Reggio Calabria. Di Bella looked at the boy's file - already swollen with charge sheets - and felt a sense of hopelessness. The family history weighed so heavily on this young man, Di Bella thought, he didn't stand a chance. By now, he was still only 16.

In court, the boy displayed the characteristics Di Bella had seen so many times in young people from mafia families. He was dead-eyed, cold, refused to engage. He had a prepared response to everything he was asked. When Cosimo was sentenced to four years for attempted extortion, he betrayed no emotion. His mother had been allowed out of prison to attend her son's trial, and was sitting quietly at the back of the courtroom. Cosimo never once turned to look at her. Di Bella noticed she showed none of the scorn and forced arrogance he usually saw in women from mafia families in public, especially in court. She looked haggard and sad. He thought how much she must be suffering.

THE YOUTH COURT of Reggio Calabria is a low palazzo, a few streets from the seafront, with stubby palm trees in the yard. Di Bella started here as a law graduate in 1992, and spent years dealing with teenagers from towns along the coast - Gioia Tauro, Palmi, Rosarno. He saw children as young as 10 put to work as look-outs by their parents, checking number plates on computer databases to see if there were unmarked police cars in the area. There was more: 12-year-olds counting containers in and out of the port at Gioia Tauro; 13-year-olds setting fire to cars whose owners had refused to pay protection money; a 15-year-old accused of murdering his own mother - punishment for dishonouring the family.

Di Bella, now 60, with neat hair and rimless glasses, is soft-spoken, quick to laugh, occasionally self-effacing. But his gentle demeanour hides a steely determination. He talks rapidly, gripping the arms of his chair: "The culture is almost jihadist - a psychological indoctrination that begins in infancy." Di Bella recognised that these children had been brought up to despise the state, and that prison held no fear for them. But he felt they had been failed. "Was that all we had to offer these kids - sending them to jail?"

After he was promoted to president of the youth court in 2011, Di Bella had an idea. He set in motion a probation system with the power to remove children from the most dangerous 'Ndrangheta families and send them far away until they were 18. A team of educators, social workers and psychologists would give probationers the support they needed to finish their education, and maybe train for a career. Parents who persisted in involving their children in crime would be stripped of their parental rights. Di Bella called the programme *Liberi di Scegliere* - Free to Choose.

News of the initiative caused an uproar. Di Bella was accused of breaking up families, of stealing children. He was called a Nazi. The criticism came not just from the parents of children who had been sent to care homes in Sardinia, Turin and Sicily, but also from the media. Newspaper columnists pronounced that taking children away from their parents, whatever the circumstances, was the work of a

totalitarian regime. The church declared that the unity of the family should be sacrosanct. From one of the fathers in prison, he received a letter with a darkly menacing tone: "We all have children," the boss wrote.

Di Bella is married to another lawyer, and they have a son. After one particularly serious threat, he was given an armed escort: two men now keep watch outside his office.

For some of the young Calabrians, joining Di Bella's programme is more challenging than prison. At least there, everyone knows whose child they are. These are kids accustomed to living like princes. Suddenly, they are a long way from home, in a crowded house, sharing a bathroom.

"At home, they are used to being treated with deference," says Maria Baronello, a social worker and sociology lecturer in Messina, Sicily. People offer them tributes - money or gifts - when they are just 12 or 13. They are heirs to this big family, they are violent, throw their weight around, they're drunk on power. But this behaviour often conceals a gnawing insecurity. "Their whole lives, they've been courted because of their name - they don't know if anyone really likes them." By the time she meets them, some of these kids have eating disorders, insomnia. Many take anti-anxiety medication because there's such a gulf between who they seem to be, and who they really are.

When Cosimo was arrested, his sister Maria was left on her own. By this time, most of the family was in prison. It had been Maria's job to deliver messages and carry money, since a young girl would almost never be searched. Di Bella judged it best for her to leave home.

This presented a particular challenge. A girl growing up in a mafia family has no autonomy. Even if she is doing well



"The culture is almost jihadist. But was that all we had to offer these kids - sending them to jail?"
Roberto Di Bella
Judge

'Imagine a son who says, "Papà, I don't want to be like you." That's going to do more damage to the mafia than 10 life sentences'
Enza Rando
 Lawyer and senator



at school, she is likely to be taken out at 12 or 13 and kept at home to reduce the risk of flirting, or dating. She has special status: no local youth would dare to chat her up, or even look at her. Maria was desperate for attention. After her parents and brother were arrested, she was sent to shared accommodation in the north. The move was organised by Enza Rando from Libera, a network of organisations working to counter the mafia. Rando, who is now a senator and leads on youth protection for the anti-mafia commission, worked with Di Bella from the earliest days of his project. She recalls Maria was horrified to find herself in the company of criminals and sex workers in her new home, and ran away. "She got herself into a real fix," Rando recalls. "It seemed important to get her into a stable situation, where she could be supervised and find her feet."

FAMILIES WHO VOLUNTEER to take in troubled young people, many with links to the church, don't necessarily expect to find themselves with a lodger from a mafia family. Journalist Giovanni Tizian interviewed a couple who fostered a teenage girl from a powerful 'Ndrangheta dynasty. They took on the challenge as a way of making a stand against the mafia: "We're a family that makes ethical choices - we buy wine grown on vineyards confiscated from the mafia, that sort of thing - but this was a way to get properly involved." The couple had two small children, and worried they might not be safe from the girl's relatives. Social services had arranged the foster care, and some of their offices seemed sloppy about security - the girl even had a phone with GPS.

The main challenge the foster couple found was the

girl's anxiety about leaving her home "down south", and betraying her loved ones, who she had last seen being taken away in handcuffs. She ran away, though she never went far. At first she barely spoke, but later she would occasionally mention something about her old life - dawn police raids, or a family member living in hiding. The tension between her two worlds was always there.

As for Maria, Rando found a foster home in the north who would take her, but she struggled to settle there and went back to Calabria. Her father kept contacting her, writing furious letters from prison telling her not to cooperate with the probation scheme, and to stay away from Di Bella. But her mother, from another prison cell, told Maria that if she wanted to make a life in the north, she would support her.

As news of Di Bella's probation system spread, he and his team started to see surprising results. Women from 'Ndrangheta families, even wives of powerful bosses, would arrive at the courthouse and ask for a meeting. They were taking a serious risk even to be there, and the conversations were often highly charged. "They would say, 'Judge, send my son away from Calabria,'" he recalls. "They would say, 'Judge, if I said this at home, I could get killed. But I can tell you: I don't sleep at night. I am so frightened, waiting for the phone call to tell me my son is in prison or dead.'"

Cosimo and Maria's mother, Anna, was powerless to influence her children, even before she was locked in jail. But not long after Cosimo's sentencing, Di Bella received a message asking if he would visit her in prison. Di Bella found her crushed by the prison experience. He had been applying for Cosimo to be released from prison early, into the Free to Choose programme.

In a private meeting room at the prison, Anna confessed she was tired of mafia life. She felt used. She was from an ordinary working family, but had been courted by the son of a mafia boss when she was still in her teens, and kept the engagement secret. When she finally told her father, he sank into a chair, without a word. There was nothing he could do to stop it: women - even teenagers - have been murdered for turning down a suitor from an 'Ndrangheta clan. But she wishes he had put up a fight. She spent the next 10 years in service to a mafia family at war. Her husband went into hiding, and she had to manage everything, ensuring he was supplied with food and intelligence, carrying messages to his men; money for whoever needed paying.

She saw in Di Bella a chance for a decent future for her children - and maybe for herself, too. She had another year or so to go on her sentence. She said: "I can't help them from here. Please, just keep them far away from Calabria."

Maria Baronello has driven to towns and villages across Calabria to visit families at risk. She has found women in deep isolation, whose husbands are in jail, under the command of their mother-in-law. "They feel their lives are over. They can't go out, unless it's to pick up the kids or the shopping. They don't have any kind of freedom. We call them white widows. They must not be seen to enjoy themselves: they have to live their husbands' prison sentence as though they're in mourning." When social services call on the women at home, Baronello says, there is always someone loitering, listening in.

A protection programme for mafiosi who collaborate with the authorities, giving testimony in return for a new identity in a hidden location, has been in place since the 90s. But for women who don't have any useful information to trade, there is no safe way out.



In 2016, while Di Bella and Rando were figuring out how to help Cosimo and Maria's mother move away from Calabria after serving her prison sentence, another woman, a mother of two, was facing prison for extortion.

To protect her identity, Di Bella gives her a fake name: Lucia. He was already familiar with Lucia's family - he had had dealings with her mother-in-law more than a decade before. One of her sons had been murdered at 17, and that unpunished death still ate away: Lucia's boys, 10 years old, had been told they must grow up to avenge their uncle. While Lucia was awaiting trial, Di Bella summoned her.

She appeared at his office, tiny, defiant, with hair dyed auburn, dressed head-to-toe in designer clothes. "She was very proud, very fierce," says Di Bella. "I said to her: 'What do you want for your boys? Because it's pretty clear what awaits them, with their family history. If you go to prison, where will they end up?' I told her, 'We could find a foster home for your kids in case you go to jail.' She said, 'Nooo! I'm not giving anyone my kids!'" (He does her voice, high-pitched with outrage.) After a heated exchange, she stormed out, slamming the heavy wooden door. "I said: 'Well, you know where to find me.'" Lucia did come back, two or three more times, and on one of those visits Di Bella could tell something had shifted.

"Judge," she burst out crying. "I want to leave Calabria. I can't take any more. I live in a mafia family. My sons will end up dead or in prison. Please help me. I don't want to lose my kids. I can't say anything to anyone, or they will kill me, but I have to get away."

Di Bella told her he would take care of it, but advised against coming to the youth courts again, as the entrance was too exposed. He started to plan her escape. They would have to leave without anyone noticing, otherwise they could be driven off the road and kidnapped. One morning in July 2016, Lucia and her boys left the house before dawn and drove to a prearranged meeting place, from where a police car took them to the airport. When they landed in northern Italy, they were met by volunteers from Libera, who drove them to their new lodgings, in a family home.

LUCIA DID GO TO PRISON, but her sons stayed with the foster family. Prison was a nightmare - she was a boss's wife, locked in with other mafia women from whom she had to conceal her change of heart. But Rando managed to get her sentence reduced, and she was released after less than a year. Libera found them a flat near the foster family so they could stay in contact. Lucia got a job in a *salumeria* - an Italian deli. Slicing ham and weighing out cheese is a humbling activity for a mafia boss's wife, but she tells Di Bella she loves it. Four years later, at a mass gathering in front of the Duomo in Milan on 21 March 2023, the annual day of remembrance in which the names of more than a thousand mafia victims are read out, Lucia stood proudly with the anti-mafia protesters.

In a crowded conference room that afternoon, I joined school groups and anti-mafia campaigners in the audience as Lucia spoke in public for the first time. Di Bella appeared over a video link, as Lucia spoke from her seat in the third row, keeping her head down to conceal her identity. (Her husband has tracked her down once, and may do so again.) In a quavering voice, she said she felt grateful to be among people who spend their days fighting for the rule of law. "I met judge Di Bella in 2016, but I hesitated, because I was

afraid to make a choice. He helped me understand that if I were to be convicted, my children would be left in the hands of mafiosi. So I had to confront the fact that my children's future would be ending up in prison, like their father, or, like their uncle, murdered by the mafia in a vendetta at 17. I said no." She broke down. Her sons, tall, good-looking boys, were sitting close by. One of them wiped away tears. "It has been a difficult road," Lucia continued, "but I can say I'm a different person now. I am reborn."

When a boy who has been in the probation scheme turns 18, the state has no more control over his life. Some of Di Bella's charges have reached that milestone and gone on to further education, but there have been notable failures, too. One young man from a powerful 'Ndrangheta family was doing charity work and dating a volunteer from an anti-mafia programme. When he turned 18, he visited his father in prison. "Playtime is over," his father said. "The family needs you." The young man sought approval from the probation system, and funding, to start a gardening business in his home in Calabria. Two years later he was arrested with half a tonne of cocaine buried under the vegetable plots.

The Free to Choose programme has now been rolled out to a wider area, including Naples, and Catania and Palermo in Sicily, but the number of cases Di Bella has successfully turned around is still small. On the other hand, there is immense propaganda value when family members turn their back on organised crime. Rando says: "Imagine the power of a son who says, 'Papà, I don't want to be like you.' If the crime family has no future, the boss's years of prison time have been wasted. That's going to do more damage to the mafia than 10 life sentences."

When Anna got out of prison, she was determined to break free of the family, and leave Calabria. But her mother was elderly and frail; she couldn't abandon her. In the end, the two women escaped in an ambulance. "We found them a place to stay close to where the daughter was living," says Rando. "By the time the old lady died, Maria was 18, and it was natural she should move in with her mother. It was hard going, they barely knew each other by this point, but they managed to work things out between them.

"Then, a new drama: the son [Cosimo] was getting out of prison early. For these two women, just getting on their feet, free of the heavy presence of the men in the family, it was not an entirely joyful prospect. It was complicated."

In prison Cosimo had been working with a psychologist, throwing himself into theatre, controlling his violent tendencies, and figuring out a new relationship with the family. He was released early, again with the support of the Free to Choose programme, and moved in with his mother and sister. This led to an uneasy shift in the family dynamic. The two women had been learning to enjoy their independence and Cosimo still felt he had to control his sister, telling her what she could wear and who she could go out with. But now Cosimo has a job, and is in love. He and his partner are expecting a baby. Anna is working for a food cooperative, grateful to be reunited with her children, far from Calabria. Her husband is serving a life sentence; Cosimo still visits him in prison. She is hoping he will come around in time.

Di Bella left Reggio Calabria for Catania three years ago, and is expanding his project across the south. He remains committed to dismantling the mafia, one family at a time ●

CLARE LONGRIGG IS DEPUTY EDITOR OF THE GUARDIAN'S LONG READ SECTION

Some names have been changed to protect the children

'I was afraid to make a choice. It has been a difficult road, but I can say I'm a different person. I am reborn'
Lucia
Member of mafia family

ROKHAYA DIALLO
Macron cares
little about
people like me
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Opinion

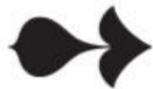
Youth Takeover

TikTok

Water slides

Nigel

We put seven young people in a group chat to discuss the UK election. This is what happened



Illustrations by
Edith Pritchett

What's been on your minds this election campaign?

Shaniya Odulawa, 23, graduate, Bexleyheath, London:

The major parties are failing to engage with what people really want. They're constantly missing the mark.

Hassan Ali, 19, student, east London: So true. It shows they're either lazy, or avoiding the real issues.

Daniel Cadell, 23, student, Cheshire: It does concern me that Labour are more centre-right at the moment and the only leftwing parties are Lib Dem and Green.

Niall Hignett, 21, student, Durham: The arguments about Labour lurching to the right are a bit overhyped. Labour's manifesto seems fairly convincing.

SO: What part is convincing to you? For me, many policies seem unfunded or not feasible.

Paris Haigh, 22, student, East Kilbride: On the environment they sound OK, eg GB Energy. But they already watered down their £28bn [\$35bn] green pledge and have U-turned on most previous commitments, so I cannot trust them.

NH: The housing policy I'm behind. I don't think it's uncosted (I'd understand criticism of it being unambitious). Encouraging capital investment in infrastructure could be huge for young people.

DC: It's insane there's been no real pushback at Nigel [Farage] saying they want zero net migration. Not only is it terrible policy, it clearly isn't possible. Half the issue is presenters not countering these claims.

PH: It's scary how many reminders I've seen under videos saying "vote Reform".

Bethan Williams, 23, account executive, Cardiff: I see this on TikToks all the time.

Tiger-Lily Snowdon, 19, student, Devon: It's really scary, especially with polls showing such an increase in support. I didn't believe people would vote Reform at first, but they've built a substantial base.

SO: When I click on the profiles there's nothing ever there. Even if they're bots, they still drive engagement.

BW: I definitely interact with a lot of political TikToks. My friend who doesn't care about politics sent me a video of Ed Davey on the water slide the other day.

NH: Labour plans to build on the "grey belt". Field mice and car parks shouldn't come above affordable housing.

SO: There doesn't always need to be a focus on building when we have properties already there. Not enough has been said about renters. I don't think I'll be able to comfortably leave home until I'm 30.

TS: If they want to attract youth voters, tackling the renting crisis would be a sensible move.

SO: When I compare my early 20s to my mum's, I can't help feeling a bit robbed.

BW: The money I pay back on student loans this year I could be using to save up for a deposit on a house.

NH: I'm estranged from my family and can't just live at home. The situation is terrifying. Under-25s don't qualify for full benefits or housing support.

SO: Finishing uni is supposed to be exciting, but I'm full of dread.

BW: Removing "Mickey Mouse degrees" won't help.

SO: People who do "Mickey Mouse degrees" create the things we love. Movies, TV shows, music.

BW: It's so frustrating how the Conservatives have handled this. They've belittled certain degree subjects but failed to provide alternatives. I studied history, which at times has been referred to as a Mickey Mouse degree. Now I work a Stem job - there is no set pathway.

NH: I think the honest answer (and I know this isn't popular) is fees need to go up - 78% never repay in full anyway. Upping fees means unis don't go under, and it won't affect most people, just those who borrow the least and earn the most.

DC: It doesn't help that board members have extreme salaries when they don't seem to do much.

BW: During the university staff strikes, my friends couldn't understand where their money was going if university staff weren't getting paid enough.

TS: The education system, especially how it works for people with special educational needs, must change. I was out of school for a long period and finally got the support I needed at a medical inclusion school - but because of lack of funding and spaces, I had to wait ages. I was disappointed by the lack of suggestions to improve Send education in the manifestos.

PH: I had a similar experience and because I was out of school for so long, I sank into depression. I know the SNP are planning on passing a neurodivergence bill. They met with neurodivergent people who had input on the bill. If it passes it should be in every manifesto.

SO: Does everyone know who they are voting for?

DC: Lib Dem, as their manifesto is the most interesting. I trust Keir and Reeves as far as I could throw them.

BW: I'll vote tactically as I have an awful Conservative MP, meaning I'll likely vote Labour. But I'm more aligned with the Green party or Plaid Cymru.

TS: I'm torn. I was most impressed by the Lib Dem manifesto, but I really don't want my Conservative MP to get back in - so Labour may be better.

PH: I'm considering Greens. My candidate seems really good. I would have voted SNP but since they dropped their climate targets I can't trust them.

NH: I'm definitely voting Labour. The Lib Dem manifesto is a bit all over the place. The Greens strike me as unrealistic. The anti-nuclear power thing seems





This election shows that the next UK government needs to raise its green ambitions

There are voters for whom the climate crisis is the most pressing issue in the UK general election. But for most people, cost of living pressures and concerns about the health service come first. This month, more than 400 climate scientists wrote to party leaders, saying it was disappointing that global heating, and policies to tackle it, are not more prominent in the campaign. They called for stronger action, including a clear path to net zero in 2050 and a halt to new fossil fuel development in the North Sea.

The disconnect between climate science and climate policy grows more alarming. Last month, a Guardian survey of hundreds of researchers found that 77% expect global temperatures to reach at least 2.5C above preindustrial levels. A report last week revealed that last year saw the highest-ever fossil fuel consumption globally, as well as record wind and solar power generation.

Labour's abandonment in February of a pledge to spend £28bn (\$35bn) a year on greening the economy was a grave error. Still, the party retained its ambitions. Labour wants the UK to be the first major economy to ensure that all power comes from cheaper zero-carbon electricity sources by 2030. The party's plan for a publicly owned energy company is also a good one, particularly the commitment to finance small solar and onshore wind schemes. Unfortunately, Labour's retreat on investment set the stage for a campaign in which climate policy is nowhere near as prominent a theme as it ought to be.

The spike in gas prices that followed Russia's invasion of Ukraine is one reason for the cost of living crisis. But rather than making the case for reduced dependence on gas, and investment in renewables as a route to increased security, Rishi Sunak set the UK back in climate terms.

Nevertheless, the UK's offshore wind industry is thriving and popular. The Green and Liberal Democrat manifestos contain ambitious climate pledges, with the Lib Dems committing to an earlier net zero target, new aviation taxes and a zero-carbon standard for new homes. The Green party promises to end new and recent oil and gas licences, introduce an escalating carbon tax and establish large-scale ecological protections.

Last week, a supreme court decision that planning decisions must take account of future greenhouse gas emissions raised the likelihood of more legal challenges to fossil fuel infrastructure. Caution has been the watchword of Labour's campaign. Rulings like this should make it easier to be bold. The biggest-ever climate opinion poll last week showed that 80% of people in the world's biggest fossil-fuel-producing countries back a swift transition. The next UK government needs to face down the cynics and lobbyists. The scale of the climate threat and the injustice it encompasses - including the implications for children and young people - should make the case for ditching fossil fuels irresistible ●

so counterproductive. Both go for Conservative voters in the home counties and liberal voters in the cities - and it doesn't work for coherent policy.

SO: I'm not convinced by any party. It's usually Labour or Green but I've lost faith, especially since the Greens' statement on Palestine - if you can't fully condemn a genocide, what do you stand for?

PH: Something every party needs to be doing right now is calling for an immediate ceasefire.

Do young people feel spoken to by any of the parties?

DC: I wouldn't say so. The fact I align Lib Dem, when their base is middle-aged, southern and middle-class and I'm not, really shows that.

PH: I only really feel spoken to by independents, tbh. And they aren't even running in my area. The climate group I'm a part of, Green New Deal Rising, is endorsing some really cool independents!

BW: I'm a young person who first engaged in politics under Jeremy Corbyn - he developed some really strong policies aimed at us that other parties haven't. Corbyn brought the green new deal to mainstream politics, which was radical and gave us a path for the future. GB Energy is largely uninspiring.

DC: The oil giants cutting their pledges when their profits grew massively shows decisive government action is needed to combat climate change.

PH: I tried to talk to Keir at his green pledge launch in Edinburgh and he completely ignored us despite us waiting three hours. It was horrible.

NH: It's just a perception that young people are completely turned off by Labour. Hyper-politically engaged people want more progressive policies, but lowering car insurance rates and building houses engage far more young voters than any other policy issue (anecdotally they do!). Young people (18-24) are voting something like 60% Labour in most polls.

This conversation was conducted over a messaging platform. It has been condensed for length

INDIA

The prosecution of Roy is a stark warning from Modi to his critics

Salil Tripathi



This month, the highest ranking bureaucrat of the state of Delhi, Vinai Kumar Saxena, permitted the Delhi police to prosecute Arundhati Roy (pictured), and Sheikh Showkat Hussain for remarks they made at a public event 14 years ago. The opposition Aam Aadmi party governs Delhi, but the capital's police reports to the central government's home ministry. While the prime minister, Narendra Modi, lost his parliamentary majority in the recent elections, the prosecution of Roy shows that those who expected a chastened government willing to operate differently are likely to be disappointed.

Hussain and Roy are to be tried for making speeches at a conference called Azadi [Urdu for "freedom"]: The Only Way, which questioned Indian rule in the then state of Jammu and Kashmir. Hussain is a Kashmiri academic, author and human rights activist. Roy is among India's most celebrated authors, with a wide global following.

After Roy won the Booker prize in 1997, for *The God of Small Things*, she became the nation's darling. It was the year of India: the 50th anniversary of independence, and the year Salman Rushdie, the first Indian-born winner of the Booker, published a volume anthologising new Indian literature. Roy became an idol. Indeed, in Mira Nair's 2001 film *Monsoon Wedding*, a character who wants to pursue creative writing is told by an uncle: "Lots of money in writing these days. That girl who won the Booker prize became an overnight millionaire."

But many of those uncles are no longer happy with Roy. When Saxena announced that Roy could be prosecuted under India's draconian Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA), because she had said at this event that Kashmir had never been an "integral" part of India, there was outrage abroad from intellectuals and writers' organisations, but responses in India were less spirited. While politicians such as Mahua Moitra of the Trinamool Congress were prompt in criticising the move, others on social media commended the government and gleefully admonished those who defended Roy. Their reasoning: Roy was "anti-national", sympathising with terrorists, and needed to face the full force of the law.

If Roy is not getting an outpouring of public sympathy, it has to do with how India has changed in the past quarter of a century. Its elite is keen to shed the past image of a poor, struggling country. India deserves a seat at the main table, they say; and dissidents and writers who question policies are inconvenient do-gooders whose pessimism interferes with India's ascent. On significant issues on which much of India's powerful elite believes there is consensus, Roy is the naysayer.

Consider Roy's views on Kashmir, the disputed territory over which India and Pakistan have gone to at least three wars. The Indian army has stationed tens of thousands of troops there, and human rights groups have accused the Indian state and extremist groups of abuses. Roy opposes India's governing consensus and conduct in Kashmir - her last novel, *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness*, describes the Kashmir crisis graphically. Triumphalist Indians don't like to hear such criticism.

Nor do many Indians like her questioning the wisdom of building large dams to produce electricity or irrigate farms. Building dams was the dream of India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru; he called dams "temples of modern India". The dams helped farms and generated power, but Roy showed how they also displaced hundreds of thousands of people.

Roy has also written critically of Gandhi's views on the "untouchable" caste Dalits, calling them discriminatory and patronising, and has been a vocal critic of India's nuclear tests and arsenal. These views offend India's conservative and liberal opinion. India's peaceniks admire Gandhi; India's Hindu nationalists hate Gandhi but love the bomb. The fact that she wins accolades abroad, and prominent western publications give her space to write, rattles and rankles them even more. The powerful in India want to hear only praise; Roy keeps reminding the world of the rot within.

Whether or not Roy gets prosecuted remains to be seen. The government may prefer the ambiguity, hoping that the threat of prosecution might keep her, and other dissidents, silent.

But one thing is certain: it was wrong to assume that Modi has changed. Pursuing someone as high-profile as Roy is the government's way of warning critics that they must not expect anything different. The sword hangs over the critics; Roy reminds us why the pen must remain mightier than the sword ●

ALAMY

FRANCE

Macron's risky gamble is playing with the lives of people like me

Rokhaya Diallo

Twenty-two years after Jean-Marie Le Pen was unexpectedly voted through to the second round of a French presidential election - an electoral shock that drew nearly a million people on to the streets in protest - the threat of the far right coming to power has returned.

On 9 June, French voters gave Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) an unprecedented victory in the European elections. Her party won a record 31.5% of the vote, twice as many votes as the centrist alliance backed by President Emmanuel Macron.

The humiliated Macron turned his defeat into a full-blown crisis by dissolving the National Assembly and calling snap elections. A new prime minister will be appointed after the second round on 7 July, and given the collapse in support for Macron's centrists, there is a chance the far right will form the next government.

We can only assume Macron was attempting to reshuffle the deck to outmanoeuvre the far right. Or perhaps his strategy is to let RN assume political responsibility and hope that, exposed to the reality of government, it will disappoint the public and be reduced to irrelevance. Whatever his intentions, choosing to treat the country like a roulette table shows how little Macron cares about the fate of millions of French people.

Macron has offered the extreme right an opportunity to increase its grip on parliament and, potentially, to govern France. In doing so he is playing with our lives. Many of us - women, people of colour, LGBTQIA+ people, Jews, Muslims, minorities - know how violent the consequences of such an election could be.

Hours after RN's victory, four men were arrested for a transphobic and homophobic assault in Paris. They told police that they were members of an extreme right group and that soon they would be able to beat up as many gay people as they wanted.

“

The rebranded far right may have erased the shameful traces of its past, but the noxious ideology hasn't changed

In the banlieues, local mayors say how concerned they are for people of colour. I took part in a recent protest in Paris against the far right, and I could tell how shocked many of those there were to realise how unwelcome they could soon be in their own country. People whose family members were born abroad or who don't hold French citizenship have told me how scared they are.

Their fears are hardly irrational. The rebranded and now well-groomed RN may have managed to erase the shameful traces of its past and mask its extremist ideology. Marine Le Pen has worked hard to appear more relatable. Jordan Bardella, 28, RN's president and lead candidate in the European elections, and now one of France's most popular politicians, has 1.7 million followers on TikTok. But his hardline Islamophobic, anti-immigrant messages are neatly concealed behind a smile that seems constructed to be reassuring.

The noxious ideology has not gone anywhere. RN's racist and xenophobic positions place the party at the furthest extreme of the political spectrum. Take its conduct in the European parliament, where Bardella has held a seat since 2019. He and fellow RN MEPs voted against the recognition of slavery as a crime against humanity, opposed resolutions on the rescue of migrants at sea and on reducing the wage gap between men and women. In the French parliament, many of them have opposed a constitutional amendment to guarantee free and legal access to abortion.

They pretend to care about social justice and the wellbeing of the poorest, but their votes demonstrate their lack of interest in addressing economic inequality. They voted against increasing the minimum wage and against indexing salaries to inflation. They opposed freezing prices on rent and essential goods. The racism that underpins the party's convictions is now viewed as legitimate by its voters. A study found 92% of RN voters believe “most immigrants do not share our country's values and that this creates problems for coexistence”.

But instead of taking on this far-right ideology, Macron has, over his two terms in office, chosen to make his policies more appealing to far-right voters. The immigration bill passed through parliament by the government last year included so many of the hardline demands of the far right that Le Pen claimed it as a victory. When he appointed a new education minister in August 2023, Macron chose not to address the profound inequalities of a school system in crisis, but to pander to crude Islamophobic tropes, targeting female Muslim pupils wearing abayas. RN's racist ideas have spread across the political spectrum, with disastrous potential consequences for millions of people.

But if Macron was betting on a fractured left with his snap election thunderclap, he was wrong. Leftwing parties have put aside their divisions, uniting to save France from extremism.

Our destinies cannot depend on careless calculations. We need to defeat the far right now, and then rid our political life of the scourge of its ideas ●



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Beware of making a false move after election shift

Timothy Garton Ash should be careful about emigrating to New Zealand (After this E-day, Europe is again in danger from the far right, Opinion, 14 June). Our election in 2023 resulted in a centre-right/populist/far-right coalition elected on tax break promises.

To provide these modest gains, public services have been slashed and environmental programmes scrapped, such as those relating to improving water quality, climate change and public transport. Priorities are road building, drilling for gas and mining.

Cancer drugs promised before the election are not being funded. The health service is in disarray. "Fast-track" legislation for economic benefits will be sanctioned by three ministers who can ignore any environmental concerns. So before fleeing Europe, Timothy, beware of what might await you.

*Richard Pickering
Christchurch, New Zealand*

A bold take on Starmer and Labour's manifesto

Boring? Really? I agree with much of what Jonathan Freedland says about Keir Starmer's steady-as-you-go approach (If Starmer is a "political robot", he's one that has been hardwired to

win, Opinion, 21 June). But I urge everyone to please read the Labour party manifesto. And then dare to tell us it is not bold.

It includes: reform of the House of Lords; creativity restored to the school curriculum; an end to one-word Ofsted ratings; safer streets provided by neighbourhood policing; a new race equality act; more decision-making powers to mayors; a properly instituted and monitored apprenticeship scheme; and revision of the voter ID rule.

Poetry enough for me.
*Eva Tutchell
London, England, UK*

The Swiss system creates a steadier government

Elections are indeed a travesty, as George Monbiot says (Elections are a travesty of democracy, Opinion, 14 June). Elections as a means for people to govern themselves may at one time and for some people have been a sincere idea, but that idea has long ago been transformed into a process to enable ambitious individuals with access to lots of money to win power and influence.

There is one European democracy where elections, when compared with elections in most other democracies, are not that big a deal: Switzerland. Elections to

the national parliament are proportional; the executive (cabinet) is constitutionally limited to seven members, who are elected by parliament to four-year terms. Each council member is assigned a portfolio.

Parliament elects annually, by rotation, one of the seven council members to serve as president and one to serve as vice-president. The Swiss also vote in frequent referendums, dealing with legislative and constitutional matters.

Switzerland's system rewards accommodation and compromise; the system enables long-term planning. The system produces reliable, steady-as-she-goes governance free of abrupt flip-flops.
*André Carrel
Terrace, British Columbia, Canada*

Conscientious objectors and the sad lessons of war

Michael Segalov's compilation of the contemporary experiences of seven conscientious objectors in different war situations reminded me of how lucky I was that the decision whether to fight in a war or not never arose for me (Keeping the peace, Features, 14 June).

In 1967 I was, as a conscript, transported from the liberated, peace loving, countercultural University of Adelaide into

an authoritarian military environment to learn the basics of how to kill communists in Vietnam.

I think the remarks of Timothy Tyndall, the seventh objector in the article, say it all: "When will we ever learn that war begets war? Violence always begets violence."

I now regard my military involvement during which I was not deployed in Vietnam as a good life experience. But the same cannot be said for many of my fellow conscripts who were needlessly killed or disabled in the Vietnam war.

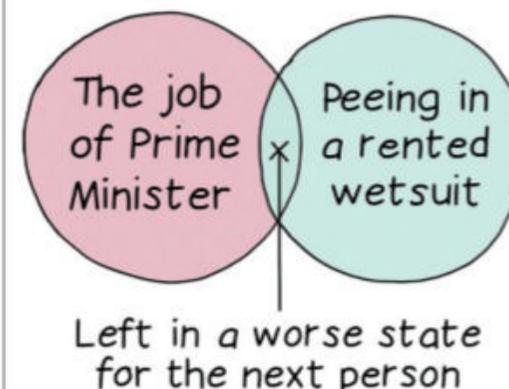
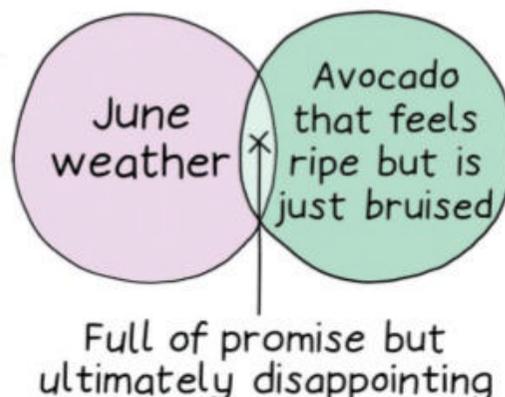
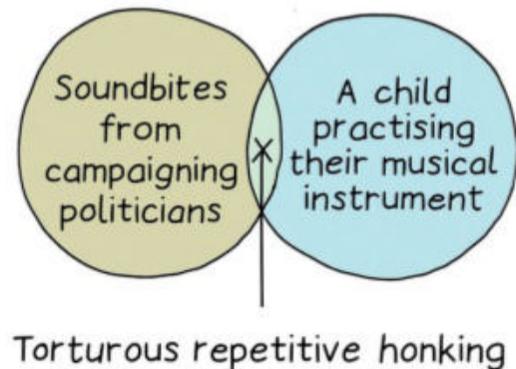
*Terry Hewton
Adelaide, South Australia*

Call for a boa restriction on Taylor Swift's fans

I live near Edinburgh's Murrayfield stadium, so I am used to fans of rugby and various performers swamping the area. Taylor Swift's fans were easily the nicest, best-behaved and most amiable we have ever seen (Money, money, money, Features, 7 June). No one urinating in our gardens. No one drunk, far less disorderly. My only complaint concerns the moulting boas, on sale from all vendors, whose floating feathers are very difficult to remove from the sweet peas. Don't know about her singing, but her fans are fabulous.

*Joan Burnie
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK*

A WEEK
IN VENN
DIAGRAMS
Edith Pritchett





Film, music, art, books & more

SCREEN

The women
who created
Black Barbie

Page 55 →

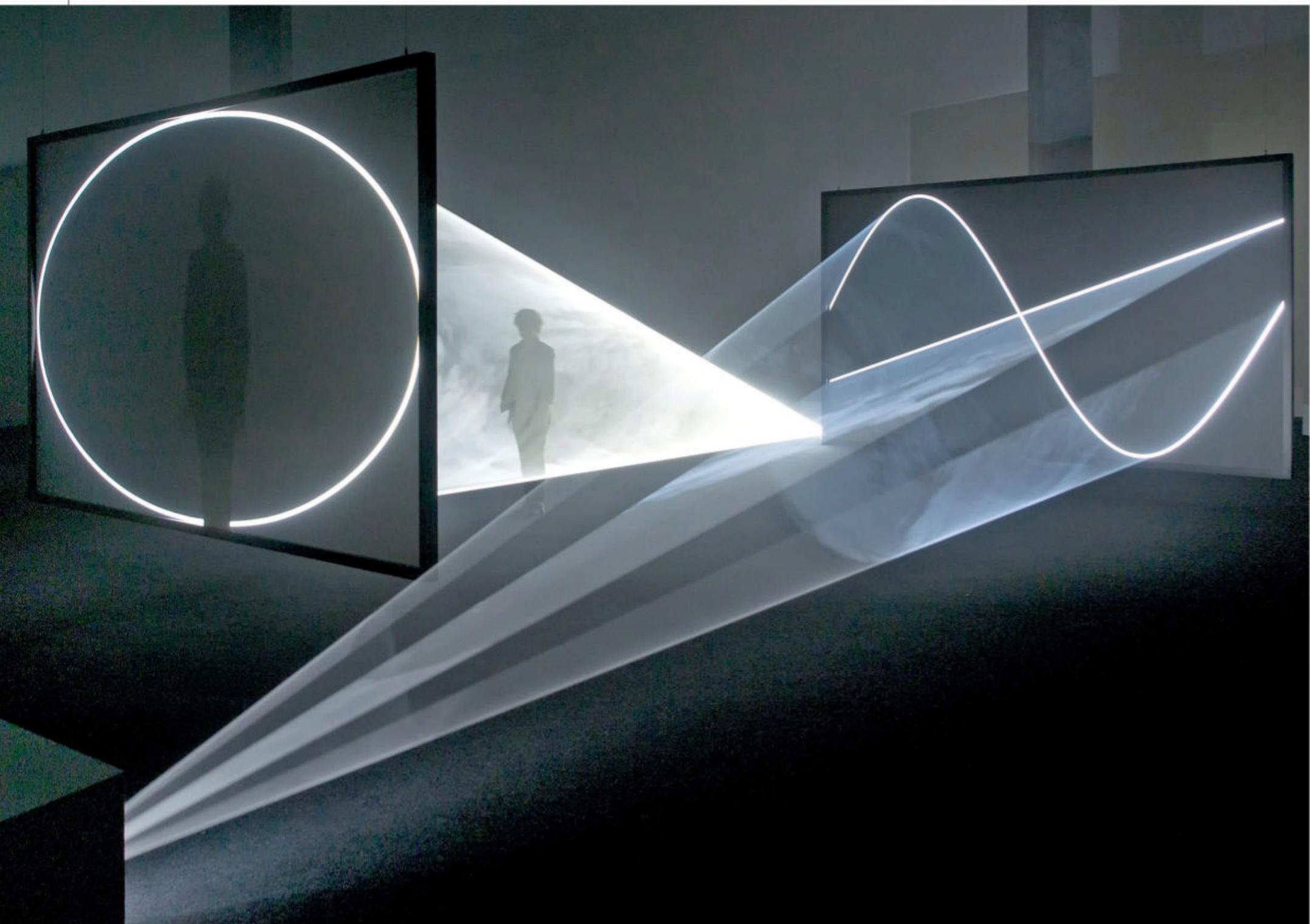
Culture



Out of the shadows

Anthony McCall made his name with 'light sculptures' that people could enter. But a show in Sweden led to 20 years in the wilderness





INTERVIEW
By Zoe Williams
COVER
PHOTOGRAPH
Ander Gillenea

▲ **Light fantastic**
Face to Face, from
2013, by McCall

JASON WYCHE/ANTHONY
MCCALL/SPRÜTH
MAGERS/SEAN KELLY/
STEFANIA BERETTA

At the beginning of 1973, Anthony McCall, sculptor of light, was 26 and had made waves with his first piece, *Landscape for Fire*. This was a film of a performance in which white-clad spectres light fires across a huge landscape, experimenting with McCall's belief that a performance isn't a performance unless it's documented. "If it takes place in the middle of nowhere," he says, "you need to record it."

Half a century later, I meet him at Tate Modern in London, which is about to launch a major exhibition of his immersive, 3D moving shapes. McCall is softly spoken, even tentative; there is nothing excitable in his manner. Yet there is something almost supernatural in the way he manages to conjure the exhilaration, radicalism and explosive creativity of that bygone era.

McCall studied graphic design and photography at Ravensbourne College, on the outskirts of London, but became "steeped in other ways of using cinema. It was called experimental film, it was called expanded cinema, structural film, new American cinema." This all fed into

Line Describing a Cone, his first "solid light" work, where the rays projected on to a screen seem to create a tangible object in the darkness.

At that time, he was in love with the performance artist Carolee Schneemann: "She had her own form of happenings called kinetic theatre, already up and running." They'd met in London, but she wanted to return to the US, so they moved to New York together. There were so many things McCall admired about the American art scene - the performance artists, loosely collected under the umbrella fluxus; the experimental film-making of Andy Warhol; Yoko Ono's drop of water, which you were invited to watch until it evaporated. "There was an intensity about the world in New York at that time which was unmistakable."

It must have seemed like a golden time. "It does to a lot of people who weren't there," he says, laughing. "But I can confirm that it was. All everyone wanted to do was talk about art - in an unpretentious, daily kind of way." There was a frantic exchange of passion, skills, ideas. "I didn't know how to make animation. I found a friend of a friend, we went to a bar, and an hour later, I had a plan. I felt those acts of openness and generosity were unique to New York."

▼ Studio time 'I felt thwarted' ... McCall

LINDA NYLIND

He and Schneemann were like the Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo of the city. Any artist blowing in there would gather around them. It was an intensely productive time for McCall: he arrived with *Line Describing a Cone* and made “three short clean films exploring different aspects of the idea. Then I made *Long Film for Four Projectors*.”

This was a five-and-a-half-hour piece conjuring up four walls of intersecting light, which visitors experienced from within. “Not that the audience had to be there for five and a half hours! The whole point was that people would come and go. There could be a couple of dozen people in there, not only looking at the film, but looking at each other looking at the film. That seemed quite intriguing.”

The series culminated in *Long Film for Ambient Light*, with no film and no equipment, all highly conceptual, and this time lasting 24 hours. “It was a good way to paint yourself into a corner,” says McCall. “The windows were covered with white paper, limiting them to being light sources during the day and reflective surface during the night. Finally, there was a two-page statement on the wall, ‘Notes on Duration.’”

AFTER TURNING 30, he began to realise he needed to make a living. “The kind of work that I made,” he says, “galleries didn’t really show.” While he may not have been making a living, McCall had a significant international reputation, and was invited to show *Line Describing a Cone* at the Konsthall Lund, a leading Swedish gallery.

He got a shock when he arrived. “I discovered, to my horror, that it was completely invisible. All I had was a line going round on the screen.” The appearance of solidity, which was the whole point, was absent. “It was meant to be a volumetric object! In a blinding flash of brilliance, I realised why: all along, I’d been working with a medium I hadn’t understood - which was dust. The films were made and shown in old lofts in New York, buildings that had previously been used for light engineering or millinery or sweatshops. If you get 10 people in there, there’s enough dust in



“ Works of art don’t come with a tag that says ‘meaning’. That’s the work of the audience ”

▼ Blazing success *Landscape for Fire*, from 1972

JASON WYCHE/ANTHONY MCCALL/SPRÜTH MAGERS/SEAN KELLY/STEFANIA BERETTA



the air to catch the light. Plus, probably a quarter of the people would be smoking continuously. The combination of the dust and smoke created a medium which made this series possible, but which I’d been unaware of.”

He ran to a tobacconist and came back smoking three cigarettes at once. But he was no match for Scandinavian hygiene and was thrown out by a guard. He tried everything to create “some particulates in the air”, from dry ice to frankincense, but nothing worked. This cast him into a wilderness he’d inhabit for the next 20 years.

From the late 70s to the 90s, McCall went back to what he’d trained in, graphic design, and began running a studio. It was quite successful: they designed metal

sculptor Richard Serra’s books. “I only felt thwarted,” he says, “when occasionally some art historian would be at the door wanting to talk about the solid light work. After finishing those interviews, I would feel as though I had betrayed everything and was wasting my time.” It got so bad that he couldn’t bear to lay out another book. “Some time in the 90s,” he recalls, “I had the desire to make works again.”

He went back to the short cone films. “One of them was called *Cone of Variable Volume*. It was very simple, just an exploratory film in which I tested the idea of a circle that would change its volume, by expansion and contraction. It was at four different speeds, from frenetic to so slow you could barely see it moving. To my surprise, I realised that it was doing something I had never noticed before. It was quite obviously breathing.”

He could never have seen that when he first made the work. “We were much too purist.” To discover that, all along, these works had been describing bodily functions came as a thunderbolt. He thought he’d been dealing in concepts, but he’d created the appearance of an organism. “I made a lot of films after that, all following this idea of the corporeal, with titles like *Between You and I*, *Meeting You Halfway*, *Skirt*, *You and I Horizontal*.”

These are mainly conical light sculptures, often leaning towards each other in eerie suggestions of human connectedness. As for what they meant, he says: “I’ve never believed the artist should be the person to ask that. Works of art don’t come with a tag that says ‘meaning’. That’s the work of the audience.” It’s never quite that simple, though. “These new ideas don’t flow evenly,” he says. “You don’t turn on a tap and get a few ounces of new ideas.”

Since his 2004 show at the Pompidou in Paris, McCall has been creating epic light sculptures, culminating in four major shows this year. As well as the Tate, there is Guggenheim Bilbao, Sprüth Magers in London, and the Museum of Art, Architecture and Design in Lisbon later in the year.

“It’s certainly been welcome,” he says, “but it’s a big surprise. You’re not thinking, as you whistle at your bench, ‘I’m pioneering.’ You’re just making something. You have no idea if it’ll be any good.”

ZOE WILLIAMS IS A GUARDIAN WRITER

Anthony McCall: Solid Light is at Tate Modern, London, to 27 April 2025

The German theatre that puts climate centre stage

As part of a wider project to reduce its carbon footprint, a Potsdam theatre is reusing props, recycling costumes and doubling up tickets as transport passes

By Kate Connolly

▼ Green rooms

Your Palaces Are Empty at the Hans Otto theatre in Potsdam

THOMAS M. JAUKE

A handful of Spanish conquistadors fight through thick undergrowth to emerge in the ivy-clad ruins of a fallen civilisation during a rehearsal of Austrian playwright Thomas Köck's *Your Palaces Are Empty*. Premiered last month at the Hans Otto theatre in Potsdam, south-west of Berlin, the bleak and unforgiving drama probes the wounds of a shattered capitalist world that has exploited its people and the planet's resources. But it is not just the play that is embracing the subject of the climate crisis.

The production itself has been declared climate neutral under a €3m (\$3.2m) pilot project launched by Germany's federal ministry of culture. The project, called Zero, is sponsoring the Potsdam theatre and 25 other cultural institutions, from dance companies to museums, to restructure their creative modus operandi.

"It leads to restrictions," says the director, Moritz Peters, as he takes a break from rehearsals. "But it also forces greater creativity."

From the lighting (switching to LED bulbs) to reducing travel (rehearsals are longer but less frequent to cut down on journeys) "everything has come in for scrutiny", says Marcel Klett, the managing director.

Swapping to a green source of electricity in 2022 improved the theatre's carbon footprint, reducing its annual 661 tonnes of emissions, or the "equivalent of 66 households", by more than 10%, but did not go far enough, Klett says. No less challenging is tackling a change in attitude. "Nurturing a sense that we all - from the set designer to the theatregoer - have a role to play," Klett says.

The costume designer, Henriette Hübschmann, says she struggled with having to abandon her usual task of creating new costumes from scratch. "At least half the costumes have to come from the existing collection of props and costumes now," she says. "The rest should be from recycled, easily recyclable or renewable materials."

Plastic sheeting that forms the backdrop of the set was found in a storeroom, the ivy is a living plant provided by the local biosphere. Wooden stools, built for the production, will be recycled. An inventory of its resources forms the basis of the theatre's first climate impact report. It states that wood makes up half the 41 tonnes of raw materials the theatre used last year, but is responsible for about 1% of the emissions produced, while four tons of steel and aluminium used in productions made up almost 30%.

"The obvious conclusion is that we'll use wood as far as possible," Klett says. Other forms of stage-set building are also being experimented with, such as growing mycelium to use as an organic building material. The potential use of this in other areas, such as exhibition architecture, is already being explored.

According to statistics from the culture ministry, less than a third of state-funded theatres in Germany produce a climate impact report. However, most will be required to do so from next year, under EU legislation that will treat theatres the same as all big commercial enterprises. Klett is hopeful of a knock-on effect among audiences and theatre staff as well as from other cultural institutes joining in. "The more the merrier - the greater the ideas and resources we can share among ourselves and with other institutions, the better," he says, acknowledging that its contribution still remained a "drop in the ocean".

He is appealing to local politicians to sponsor the erection of solar panels on the theatre's roof and allowing the space - a former Prussian military stables - to be insulated, which is currently not allowed because the building is listed. The success of the project, though, will largely depend on how the audience travel to the theatre. Although 20% of its theatregoers already arrive by bike or on foot, travel is the theatre's single biggest polluting factor, contributing to about 50% of its emissions. In response, theatre tickets will double up as public transport passes in the three hours before and after the play, under the campaign slogan: #OhneAutoInsTheater (Car-less to the theatre).

Your Palaces Are Empty is dystopian, vicious and bleak, and though not endlessly pessimistic, says Peters, it offers little consolation. It ends with uplifting pop music and children "offering a somewhat hopeful note", he adds. "I'd like to think the audience leaves, saying: the situation is serious, but we should keep going nevertheless at the same time as taking it very seriously."

KATE CONNOLLY IS THE GUARDIAN AND OBSERVER'S BERLIN CORRESPONDENT





The birth of Black Barbie

For 20 years, all Barbie dolls were white. A Netflix documentary looks at the effect that had on Black girls, and speaks to women who brought about change

By Susan Smith Richardson

▲ **Diverse dolls**

Barbies reflect a range of women
NETFLIX

► **Mattel women**

(From left) Stacey McBride-Irby, Kitty Black Perkins and Beulah Mae Mitchell

NETFLIX

You don't have to be a Barbie girl to be interested in *Black Barbie: A Documentary*, the history of the first Black Barbie in 1980 and the doll's significance for Black girls in a world that still questions their natural beauty. The film is a tribute to the Black women who advocated for and designed the doll and a discourse on representation.

To explain why Black Barbie matters and how a blond-haired, blue-eyed Barbie, the embodiment of an unrealistic white beauty standard, can strike at the self-image of Black children in America, the writer-director Lagueria Davis uses the landmark doll tests from the 1940s. Psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark conducted the tests to determine the effects of segregation on Black children's self-esteem. They gave the children, aged three to seven, white and Black dolls that were identical except for skin colour. Then they asked them to attribute positive and negative characteristics to the dolls; most of the children rejected the Black dolls, shocking US supreme court justices who cited the study in the court's 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* decision to desegregate public schools.

The documentary unfolds through the story of Davis's aunt, Beulah Mae Mitchell, a former employee of Mattel, the toymaker that produced

the first Barbie, in 1959. Davis, who also narrates the film, learns about Black Barbie and her aunt's involvement in the doll's creation. When Ruth Handler, Mattel co-founder and Barbie's creator, asked employees for suggestions to improve Mattel, Mitchell said: "We want a Black Barbie."

In 1976, Mattel hired Kitty Black Perkins, its first Black designer, who designed the first Black Barbie a few years later. "I wanted to reflect the total look of a Black woman. I wanted [Black Barbie] to be the complete opposite of blonde Barbie," Perkins said. Black Barbie had an afro. Her lips were fuller, and her nose was a bit wider than Barbie's. She sported bold jewellery and a red wraparound skirt with a thigh-high slit inspired by Diana Ross's wardrobe.

In 1996, Perkins hired Stacey McBride-Irby, who created new Black Barbie lines, part of the groundbreaking but little-known work by Mattel's Black female designers. In the documentary, Mitchell, Perkins and McBride-Irby share a sweet on-camera reunion, reflecting the camaraderie they forged at Mattel years ago.

Black Barbie: A Documentary debuted in March 2023, months before Greta Gerwig's fictional Barbie was released. Both films pay tribute to pioneering women. In Gerwig's film, Handler is a feminist godmother, and Barbie Land celebrates the rainbow of Barbies that followed the first Black Barbie doll. Today, Barbie is considered the most diverse doll line on the market.

It's hard to fathom that an adult white female doll was an evolutionary leap for girlkind in the 50s. But before Barbie, girls of all backgrounds played with baby dolls, encouraging a future as mothers. Barbie, a fashionista and independent woman, inspired aspirations beyond motherhood. But for Black girls, the doll reinforced a beauty standard that rejected their bodies, hair, features and skin colour. They didn't have dolls they could relate to until Black Barbie, which the director explores in multiple interviews. Some women were on the verge of tears as they recalled being ridiculed for their skin colour or the loneliness of playing with dolls that looked nothing like them. "Crowning this doll as Barbie was telling the world that Black is beautiful, too," →





one woman said. The tagline for the first Black Barbie, recited by another, sealed the sentiment: “She’s Black. She’s beautiful. She’s dynamite.”

Davis enlists some famous Black female firsts to discuss Black Barbie’s importance and the challenges of representation: prima ballerina Misty Copeland, Olympic fencing medalist Ibtihaj Muhammad, US representative Maxine Waters of California, actor Gabourey Sidibe and the ruler of scripted TV, Shonda Rhimes. Rhimes worked with Davis to bring the documentary to Netflix and was an executive producer.

Mattel has modelled two Barbies after Rhimes: the first sports a glamorous flowing skirt. Rather than have her bespoke doll imitate Barbie’s figure, the producer instructed the designers to make her Barbie thicker in the waist.

Waters said she grew up playing with white dolls because there were no Black dolls. Later in life, she began collecting Black dolls. “I began to understand how important it was to have a Black doll, to have someone who looked like me,” she said.

Sidibe, whose breakout role was in the 2009 film *Precious*, said the original Barbie set unrealistic body expectations. “I remember thinking: ‘So Barbie is what I’m supposed to grow into being?’ Maybe when I’m a grownup, I’ll look like that. But I knew my mom was a grownup and didn’t look like that.”

Davis divides her documentary into three acts: what it was like before Black dolls, what it was like with them, and what has changed since the presence of Black Barbie and other Black doll lines. In the final act, she returns to the doll tests, enlisting Dr Amirah Saafir, a professor of child and adolescent studies at California State University, Fullerton. Instead of asking Black children and children of colour to choose between white and Black dolls as the Clarks did, Saafir’s test presents them with racially diverse dolls. A therapist asks them which doll is most attractive, which doll looks like them and which doll is the “real Barbie”, among other questions.

Most kids choose dolls that resemble them, but they consider the white Barbie the “real Barbie”. In their eyes, white Barbies are at the centre of the Barbie world, and Barbies of colour are on the periphery. Some children noted that in Barbie cartoons, movies and ads, white Barbie is the lead character, and Barbies of colour are secondary characters. The test leaves us with this conclusion: representation alone doesn’t change racial hierarchies. More than 40 years after Black Barbie’s debut, are Black girls still in a white Barbie world? The documentary leaves viewers to decide how far we have come.

Inspired by the women who made the doll a reality “by creating something they didn’t see but wanted”, Davis said, “we finally made Black Barbie the hero of her own story”.

SUSAN SMITH RICHARDSON IS A JOURNALIST, NEWS EDITOR AND MEDIA EXECUTIVE

Black Barbie: A Documentary is out on Netflix



FILM

The Bikeriders

Dir: Jeff Nichols

★★★★★

Jeff Nichols’ motorcycle movie is about a love triangle and a succession crisis - inspired by the immersive 1968 study of Chicago bikers by photojournalist Danny Lyon, whose black-and-white pictures flash up with the closing credits. This film opens up the storytelling throttle with a throaty growl, delivering the doomy romance of an old-fashioned western and the thrills of a mob drama.

The *Bikeriders* is set in a world in which the increasingly careworn gang leader competes for the affection of his toughest follower with this man’s girlfriend, at the same time grooming him as his heir.

Tom Hardy is Johnny, truck-driver, family man and founding head of the 60s Chicago motorbike club the Vandals. Austin Butler is Benny: deeply in love with Kathy (Jodie Comer), he is the toughest of the Vandals whose violent altercation with civilian locals leads to the gang’s mutation into a quasi-crime mob. The performances aren’t subtle exactly, but there’s enormous potency and impact in everything they do onscreen. *Peter Bradshaw*
Showing in UK and US cinemas; on release in Australia from 4 July

Podcast of the week *Backfired*

After *Slow Burn*, *Think Twice* and *Fiasco*, Leon Neyfakh turns his attention to vaping, which he’s desperately trying to give up (he even gets caught at it by co-host Arielle Pardes). What’s so thought-provoking is how the UK touts vaping as a tool to give up smoking, while the US tries to eradicate it with flavour bans. *Hannah Verdier*

MUSIC

The Killers

Co-op Live, Manchester

★★★★☆

When the Killers headlined the NME indie rock tour in 2005, singer Brandon Flowers’ shocking-pink jacket gave an early hint of the Las Vegas ensemble’s showbiz leanings. Nineteen years of massive success later, there are lasers, ticker-tape cannons and the band perform in front of huge films of the American desert and constellations. The singer’s latest suit - glittery black - is restrained by comparison.

With guitarist Dave Keuning fully ensconced again after a hiatus, the band set the pace with a series of big hitters. *Somebody Told Me* and *Smile Like You Mean It* are met with seas of swaying arms and audience-assisted “whoah whoah”s, while Flowers quips that 2008’s laser-boosted *Spaceman* was written “before it was acceptable to believe in aliens”. Still only 42, the fresh-faced frontman comes over like a cross between a young Elvis Presley and a fairground compere.

This show has two gears: epic and even more epic. While a bit more light and shade wouldn’t be unwelcome, there’s a touching moment when Flowers talks about the premature death of his mother and gets the 23,500-strong crowd to hold up phones for people we have lost. The show must go on, of course, but *A Dustland Fairytale* and *Be Still* are accordingly emotional. They save the biggest singalongs - *All These Things That I Have Done*, *When You Were Young*, *Human* and *Mr Brightside* - for a triumphant home run, but Flowers twice stops the show for audience members to receive medical attention. Within this eye-popping extravaganza there is a human heart. *Dave Simpson*
Touring to mid-October



FICTION

Uncharted waters

Three sisters seek love at the end of the world in a brilliantly audacious take on King Lear and its reckonings of the climate crisis

By Lara Feigel

Do individual losses still matter in a world in its final stages? This is the question asked by Agnes, Isla and Irene, three queer, volatile daughters who congregate uneasily to view the corpse of their divisive, megalomaniac architect father Stephen Carmichael, while the rain pours down outside - as it has poured down for several years. Carmichael has been both a contributor to this state of affairs - his gleaming masterpieces defied the early signs of climate crisis - and a saviour for the rich. His own house, which he has gifted provocatively to his youngest daughter alone, is a modernist folly-cum-masterpiece built high on ingeniously floating pylons.

This rainy city, where people live makeshift lives on the top floors of flooded tower blocks, travelling by ferry, is natural territory for Julia Armfield. She is both poet and prophet of the watery and the queer and the channels connecting them. Her vision of the sea creature in all of us - scales hidden under skin - is as seductive as the charged, casually incandescent sentences she conjures it in. She is writing in an honourable tradition: throughout literary history there are watery women destined to find and to lose themselves in the depths of the sea. Armfield has given this trope new political urgency, first in 2022's *Our Wives Under the Sea*, featuring a hushed-up submarine disaster, and now in this convincing imagining of the next phase in the climate crisis.

Carmichael's youngest daughter, Agnes, is a swimmer by temperament. She takes refuge in the shadowy thoughts she has while lane swimming breaststroke, glad that here she's "less liable to come upon a thought that will cause her to scream and to never stop screaming". Sometimes, her brain thus buoyed, she has brief sexual

encounters with women in the changing room. A childhood spent cowering from the father who hit her and left her to cry alone until she wet herself has left her fearful of more vulnerable forms of intimacy. Then she unexpectedly falls in love, opening herself to an efflorescence of tenderness, as her lover Stephanie leads her to an obsolete swimming pool on the rooftop of a makeshift nightclub. Stephanie opens up the pool cover to allow the rainwater in, and Agnes discovers the pleasures of a drenched, obliterating kind of sex, "the two of them moving in tandem, floating and drowning, fixed somewhere between".

The novel is an overt take on *King Lear*; the play is still one of the most powerful reckonings of our powerlessness before the climate that we have, made back in the days when the climate wasn't something we had created.

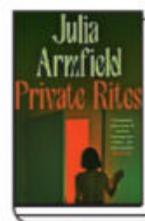
Armfield's daughterly take on Shakespeare is brilliantly audacious. Agnes and her older, bossier sisters try to come together, only to slip into habitual competitiveness. At the heart of this are absent mothers. The sisters seek out forms of mothering, only to reject them, and offer themselves as maternal figures, only to withdraw.

There's a mystery charging through the book, signalled in the cryptic opening scene where a woman gashes a bloody cut in another woman's mouth in a cultish ritual. Gradually this emerges as a memory from Irene's childhood. The book ends with a revelation about this that takes the form of a scene in the kind of horror film that Armfield has alluded to throughout. I found this brutal and jarring. Having committed to the intricacy of these women's feelings, it's frustrating and disorienting suddenly to find ourselves in another kind of story. This seems to be the point: Armfield is always committed to experiments with genre and here she rips away realism, suggesting the old novelistic forms are as inadequate now as the half-hearted forms of political protest that take place in the background.

The great strength of *Private Rites* is that it never commits to an apocalyptic vision, even as the world it depicts becomes cartoonishly apocalyptic. In the final, astonishingly moving pages, the narrator affirms her commitment to dailiness in life and in art. "Better to hold one's hands to whatever warmth there is, to kiss and talk and grieve and fuck and hold tight against the whitening of the sky." Is it possible both to

be responsible in the face of the largest challenges and to honour the tiny possibilities for grace in love? Armfield stages this dilemma with great vitality. There's no new order, as in *Lear*; it's too late for the kind of responsibility that might fend off apocalypse. But here, too, the survivors have discovered love with new clarity, and small forms of weathered, personal redemption remain grimly possible.

LARA FEIGEL IS AN AUTHOR, CRITIC AND CULTURAL HISTORIAN



BOOK OF
THE WEEK

Private Rites

By Julia
Armfield

▲ **Water ways**
Porto Alegre
in Brazil, with
streets sub-
merged by floods

JEFFERSON BERNARDES/
GETTY

MEMOIR

Meet the parents

Comic David Baddiel overshares about his outre childhood, revolving around his mother's infidelity with a golf-obsessed lover

By Fiona Sturges

▼ Family line

The Baddiels (from left): Dan, David, Ivor, Sarah and Colin in 1974



In another life, David Baddiel's mother, Sarah, could have been an aristocrat living in a big house with servants and married to a rich businessman - or so she imagined. In the early 1930s, her German Jewish parents, Ernst and Otti, had been extremely wealthy; according to a cousin, they owned a painting by Rubens. But then the Nazis took their home, their livelihood and murdered their relatives, so they fled with their baby to England. Twenty-five years later, their daughter was living in a modest house in London's Dollis Hill with three sons and her husband, Colin, an emotionally detached, working-class research scientist who, after being made redundant, sold Dinky Toys on a market stall. For Sarah, the most exotic life got was when the family went on their annual holiday to Swansea. And so, to assuage her disappointment, she embraced a fantasy version of her life with the help of David White, her golf-obsessed, polo neck-wearing, pipe-smoking lover.

In *My Family: The Memoir*, the comic and *Jews Don't Count* author spills the secrets of Sarah, Colin and his own outre childhood in 60s and 70s London. This isn't the first time their story has been told. Baddiel's 2016 stage show *My Family: Not the Sitcom* revolved around his mother's infidelity and her sudden, improbable interest in golf memorabilia, which was triggered by White and which, equally improbably, she managed to turn into a thriving business. That show also revealed the impact of Colin's illness: in his later years he had Pick's disease, a form of dementia affecting the frontal lobe that is known to cause angry outbursts and disinhibition, traits he already possessed in spades.

My Family takes that material, fills in the gaps and once again draws out the comedy as it reflects in greater detail on why Baddiel's parents were

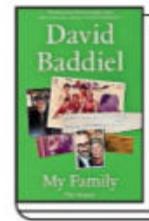
the way they were. As the author makes clear, this is no misery memoir. Though his childhood was characterised by chaos and neglect, there was also silliness and love. Much of that love radiated from his older brother, Ivor, who, just 18 months his senior, would step in and parent him, getting him up in the mornings, giving him breakfast and putting him on the school bus. But there is a seam of sadness, too: at the loss of his parents (Sarah died in 2014 and Colin in 2022), at their dysfunctional relationship and at their failure to shield their children from that dysfunction.

The book reproduces photos, drawings and miscellaneous paperwork from his parents' lives, allowing us to share in the weirdness of his mother's communications with White along with her vast stock of eccentric golf-themed trinkets. Perhaps the strangest part of the story is that Sarah would leave evidence - such as love letters - of her affair lying around for all to see. To let her friends and family in on this supposedly secret life was to proudly

show them how interesting she was, even though Baddiel insists Colin remained oddly, perhaps determinedly, in the dark.

When her children were adults, Sarah would copy them into her emails to White. Once, while making a guest appearance on her son's TV show, Sarah suggested that not all of her children had been fathered by her husband. While Baddiel notes there is no concrete evidence to corroborate this, Ivor's childhood drawings tell their own story. Reproduced here, each features a tall man smoking a pipe. "My father did not smoke a pipe. I think we know who did," writes Baddiel, flatly. In the fifth and final picture, the pipe has grown and taken on the unmistakable aspect of a penis. "It may not surprise you to know that I've spent a lot of time in therapy," he adds.

Baddiel writes with a comic's fluency and



**My Family:
The Memoir**
By David
Baddiel

TECHNOLOGY

OK computer

This refreshing look at the world of AI is marred by a reliance on boys' own tales and Arnie's Terminator

By Adam Rutherford

There is, it seems, an unwritten law that any discussion of AI must reference the Terminator. The relentless analyses of the moment we are in - where we apparently stand on precipices of revolutions, ushering in utopia or the apocalypse - tend to be written by men who have seen Arnold Schwarzenegger's Terminator failing to assassinate Sarah Connor many times over. AI expert Neil Lawrence springs the trap on page one of *The Atomic Human*, and the film makes a further 15 appearances. We understand big ideas through storytelling. Much has been made of humans as storytelling machines, and Lawrence embraces this mode of science communication with gusto.

He indulges us with the Bletchley Park saga, Alan Turing's brilliance and details of the technologies and

strategies of the second world war, in exploring ideas of intelligence and how computers can or don't emulate human cognition. We veer from Great Man classic tales of Isaac Newton, Winston Churchill and Stephen Hawking, down a cul-de-sac visiting William Blake and Michelangelo, then to Lewis Carroll and Bertrand Russell, and all the way to Elon Musk. Page after page of the *Atomic Human* are war stories and rocket stories, jumping about in time and space. Even if the intended narrative here is to synthesise a thesis about how these tales contribute to our understanding of intelligence, I couldn't pick out the relevance of so many boys' own adventures to the subtitle: "Understanding ourselves in the age of AI."

Lawrence is, however, refreshingly dismissive of the amount of posturing and bullshit in the world of AI. Instead,



**The Atomic
Human**
By Neil
Lawrence

timing. His prose is conversational, frequently pre-empting potential misgivings or questions from the reader, and contains lengthy digressions into his own life as a standup, TV presenter, film-maker, father and cat lover. Remarkably, the tale of his mother's affair is told without judgment, and with genuine empathy, while gleefully dancing around the edges of decency. It's with much amusement that he shares an email from Sarah, written to White, where she announces, in capitals, "MY CLITORIS IS ON FIRE!!!!" This leads to a gag about her funeral that I won't ruin, but which for me prompted more of a choke than laughter. There are lots of these woah-did-he-just-say-that? moments. But in this instance, the author taps into something important and rarely examined: how we talk about the dead.

He recalls being at his mother's funeral where people he'd never met kept telling him how wonderful she was. Overwhelmed by the one-dimensional platitudes, he found he wanted to talk about her complexities, her singular vitality, her transgressiveness and absence of boundaries. In other words, the things that made her *her*. In this book, a eulogy of sorts, he does that for both his parents - in the case of his father, detailing how, long before his dementia, he was swearsy, charismatic, embarrassed by emotion and capable of devastating verbal cruelty.

Has Baddiel, who says he is an uncontrollable truth-teller, shared too much? I would argue not. Telling deeply personal stories that include the good, the terrible, the humiliating and the ridiculous is the job and compulsion of effective memoirists and comics. My Family is less about how mums and dads fuck you up as how they are weird and complicated and hilarious, and how you can miss them once they are dead even though, in life, they could be massive pains in the arse. In giving us the full, unvarnished picture, Baddiel has done his parents proud.

FIONA STURGES IS A WRITER AND CRITIC

he offers novel insight into what intelligence is, how it evolved, and how it is distributed in different living and non-living systems. Comparisons to psychological processing, and the intricacies of the intelligent learning behaviour of our own nervous systems, provide insight into the neural processes that do, might or don't underlie complex artificial administration - for example, in the process of buying from Amazon, where Lawrence worked for several years - and how much of what is described as AI is merely computation and statistics.

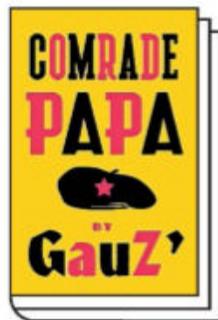
Overall, *The Atomic Human* is a sensible book, because it tries, and to some extent succeeds in, rising above the very shallow oceans of public debates about AI that are often shocking but ultimately dull. I just wish he hadn't started with a tired Uzi-toting cyborg from the 1980s.

ADAM RUTHERFORD IS A GENETICIST AND SCIENCE WRITER AND BROADCASTER

BOOKS OF THE MONTH

The best recent translated fiction

By John Self



Comrade Papa

By GauZ', translated by Frank Wynne

This funny, ebullient tale of French colonial exploitation of Ivory Coast tells two alternating stories. In the late 19th century, a young man joins a colonial expedition, caught between self-styled "Negrophiles" and "Negrophobes" as he experiences his own bumpy personal voyage of discovery. Meanwhile, a century later, a European Black boy gives an account, filled with comic malapropisms, of his own trip to Ivory Coast, and his upbringing by his communist father. Ivorian author GauZ' was shortlisted for the International Booker prize for his novel *Standing Heavy*. *Comrade Papa* is even better.

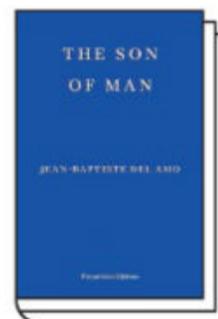


Clean

By Alia Trabucco Zerán, translated by Sophie Hughes

There's no hanging about in Chilean author Alia Trabucco Zerán's third novel, which opens with images of rabbits being frightened to death,

life-threatening fungus, a piglet killed - and the warning that, in the end, "the girl dies". Our narrator is Estela ("I've killed before"), who worked as a nanny to a wealthy couple, and "the girl" is their daughter Julia. Estela appears to be under questioning by police, held in a room and talking directly to "you who'll eventually pass judgment on me". Her story proceeds at pace, building its depth from an accumulation of small details: the family's cruelty to her; the father's shocking way of teaching Julia to swim; the secret behind the household maid. A strong narrative energy drives the novel to its conclusion, by which time the atmosphere is so full of dread you could weigh it.

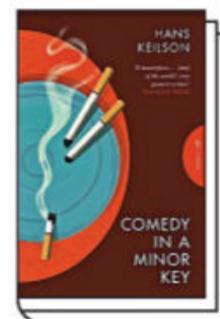


The Son of Man

By Jean-Baptiste Del Amo, translated by Frank Wynne

An opening scene of a group of ancient hunters switches - in a 2001: A Space Odyssey-style jump cut - to a present-day French family on a journey. "Are we there yet?" They're heading to the father's old house in the mountains of Les Roches to spend the summer. But this is no holiday: through flashbacks we begin to get the full, ugly picture, all told in visceral, physical prose. The mother lives on romance novels, beer and

painkillers; the supplies packed by the father include cigarettes and a revolver. The father's unpredictability reflects his experience with his own father, the mother turns out to be pregnant - and what about the mysterious Uncle Tony? The novel explores how unknowable the motives of adults are to children, and how man hands on misery to man. There aren't many laughs on the way to the inevitable, satisfying conclusion, but it isn't half gripping.



Comedy in a Minor Key

By Hans Keilson, translated by Damion Searls

First published in German in 1947, this novella is a surprisingly entertaining account of a Dutch couple harbouring a Jewish man in their home during the Nazi occupation. As though things aren't difficult enough, he then dies and becomes a much bigger problem. The story switches between his time in the house and the couple's attempts to dispose of his body. At first it appears that they have the ideal solution, and dump him under a park bench at night - then they remember he was wearing a pair of the husband's monogrammed pyjamas ... Keilson wrote only four works of fiction in his lifetime. We should treasure them.

JOHN SELF IS A LITERARY CRITIC

ASK

Annalisa Barbieri



My parents sent me to private school but I feel I've failed them

When I was 11, my parents sent me to private school. They couldn't afford to, but my dad was from a working-class background and saw it as an "investment". He hoped it would lead to the life he never had: a good degree and a well-paid job.

Throughout my childhood, I was aware that my parents struggled to pay the fees. My mum didn't work full-time due to previous mental health issues; things always felt on a knife-edge. I was bullied at my new school, nothing extreme, but I was unpopular and became very shy - a stark contrast to my early childhood. I turned out to be non-academic and was encouraged by the school to pursue a career in the arts (rather than the traditional medicine, law or Stem subjects). This disappointed my dad and made my mum very anxious.

A little more than a decade since leaving school, working in the arts has shattered me. I am aware of the privileged position private school put me in, and the worlds it opened up culturally, but now

I am trying to find a way out to something more financially and mentally sustainable.

My dad is not fit enough to work, unemployed with no pension, and I am terrified I can't support my parents as they age because of the path I chose at 17. My dad regularly jokes that I was "expensive", but I feel like a failed investment. I'm often suicidal and have extremely low self-esteem. I loved my job, but even my parents aside, I couldn't afford to stay in it.

How do I reconcile with this guilt?

If ever there was a letter about the futility and selfishness of parental projection and expectations, this is it. As I've said before, we often feel guilt when we are doing the work - the heavy lifting - for other people. Your parents chose to send you to a school they could ill afford, to live out a life they didn't. Children aren't like vending machines - you don't pump money in, press a button and get what you selected.

I need to address the suicidal thoughts first. I am very sorry you feel like this. Have you made any plans to harm yourself? If so, please tell someone you trust and have a plan of action for when you feel like this (friends you can ring or text who can be there for you).

I spoke to psychotherapist Graham Music. His first reaction to your letter "was to feel quite cross for the amount of pressure you seem to have received and to have

taken on yourself. I thought: 'Who is making the sacrifices here?'" He added: "Sometimes suicidal feelings can be anger turned inwards, to protect other people who perhaps these feelings are more aimed at."

You see your parents as having made sacrifices, but you have sacrificed an awful lot, and risk sacrificing more, and that was a choice that was foisted on you.

I'm sure your parents were trying to do their best, but constantly reminding you of that is corrosive and self-defeating. It wasn't about seeing who you really are either, or understanding that academic achievement doesn't always lead to happiness. What does lead to internal happiness is seeing ourselves reflected back by the people we love, and being accepted for who we are, whatever that is.

"What you really need," advised Music, "is self-acceptance. It's OK to feel resentful, or even cross that you feel this pressure to live a life that's expected of you, rather than the one you want to live."

You need to find a place where you can learn who you are and work out what you want to do for yourself. "It's time to let go, and you may need help - therapy - to do that," said Music.

It is a valuable lesson, as an adult child, to learn you can be angry with your parents, resent them, appreciate them and love them all at the same time. *International helplines can be found at befrienders.org*

If you would like advice on a family matter, email ask.annalisa@theguardian.com. See theguardian.com/letters-terms-for-terms-and-conditions

What leads to internal happiness is being accepted for who we are

STEPHEN COLLINS



Stephen Collins COLLINS.COM

KITCHEN AIDE

By Anna Berrill



Bold ideas for a well-dressed salad – and without the need for oil

It's hard to deny the transformative power of a good salad dressing, but you don't need much oil, if any. Honey, for example, will give "a natural stickiness that helps adhesion to your salad, while the sweetness balances the acidity of vinegar", says Tony Rodd, head chef at Pomus in Margate. He favours the heather variety, whisking it with balsamic vinegar and wholegrain mustard – this is magic when tossed with blanched greens, grilled peaches, and torn burrata. He advises adding toasted nuts and seeds for texture.

Chris Shaw, head chef at Toklas in London, suggests yoghurt, garlic and vinegar or lemon juice. "You can achieve the same consistency as a caesar dressing, but with the sourness of yoghurt, which I prefer," he says, and although he'd normally then loosen it with a little olive oil, you could use a splash of water. Toss with robust leaves (think gems), or into coleslaws, potato salads, chopped salads ... you have options.

If, however, you want the creaminess but without the dairy, go with nuts. "We use blanched almonds, pine nuts and hazelnuts in the restaurant," says Shaw. These are gently cooked in water, then blended with more water, vinegar (something white) and garlic. You'll be left with a nut cream, which is crying out for shaved raw cauliflower, beetroot, potatoes, or sturdier salad leaves (radicchio, say).

Elaine Goad, head chef at Nopi in London, favours toasted cashews, which she blends with water, tahini, lime juice, garlic and maybe miso. Another Goad favourite is something resembling a Thai papaya salad dressing. "Muddle tomatoes, add a bit of palm sugar, lime juice, chilli (for heat), fish sauce (or soy, if you're vegetarian), and coriander." Bookmark this for slaw, although another winner with the crunchy stuff – especially hispi cabbage and kohlrabi – is a combination of rice-wine vinegar, maple syrup, lime juice and sesame oil.

Finally, Rodd would keep ponzu on heavy rotation. "It does take a little work to make, but it will keep in the fridge for a month," he says, plus it's versatile; use it as a glaze for barbecues as well as dressing salads. "Take the zest and juice of lemons, limes, oranges, grapefruit and yuzu (if you can find it), add soy sauce or tamari, then throw in dried seaweed (kombu is best), and some dried mushrooms." Bring to a boil, simmer for 20 minutes, and leave overnight. "Strain, pour the liquid into a clean pan, add mirin, sake and sugar, then reduce slightly to create a sticky, glossy dressing." While tuna tartare or ceviche are obvious co-habitants, Rodd recommends tossing it with citrus, samphire, seaweed and beans for a salad that's dressed to impress.

ANNA BERRILL IS A FOOD WRITER
Got a culinary dilemma? Email feast@theguardian



THE WEEKLY RECIPE

By Yotam Ottolenghi

№ 273

Spicy Tunisian savoury pastries



Prep 25 min

Cook 35 min

Serves 8

● DAIRY FREE

My original recipe for this included instructions on making the pastry from scratch, but these days I am more inclined simply to reach for some filo. The filling is lovely just as it is with rice or bulgur wheat.

Method

Put the onion, carrot, celery and coriander in a food processor and blitz to a rough paste.

Put half the olive oil in a large saute pan on a medium-high heat, scrape in the vegetable paste and fry, stirring occasionally, for 15 minutes, until the vegetables are soft and there is no liquid left in the pan. Add the ground cumin and coriander, tomato paste, harissa, grated tomato, a third of a teaspoon of salt and 90ml water, cook for five minutes, until the soft red paste starts to caramelize, then take off the heat. Once the mix has cooled to room temperature, stir in the lemon juice, tuna (if using) and olives.

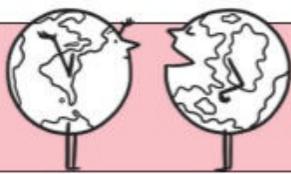
Lay one filo rectangle on an oiled work surface and spread 55g of the filling over the top half of the pastry rectangle, starting from one of the short edges and keeping a clear 1cm border all around the edge until half the pastry is evenly covered. Brush the border with oil, fold the uncovered pastry over the top of the filling to enclose, then gently press together the edges to seal (to make smaller parcels, put the filling on only a third of the pastry, then fold it in three, like a letter). Brush the pastry all over with more oil, then set aside and repeat with the remaining filo and filling.

Put two teaspoons of oil in a large nonstick frying pan on a medium heat. Once it's hot, fry two or three pastries at a time for two minutes on each side, until golden brown all over, then put in a low oven to keep warm while you fry the remaining pastries, adding more oil as needed. Serve while the pastries are still hot.

Ingredients

1 onion, peeled and quartered (180g)
1 large carrot, peeled and cut into chunks (100g)
2 large celery sticks, cut into chunks (100g)
50g bunch fresh coriander, leaves and tender stems picked
6 tbsp olive oil
1 tsp ground cumin
1 tsp ground coriander
1½ tbsp tomato paste
2 tbsp red harissa
1 medium plum tomato, coarsely grated (discard the skin)
Fine sea salt
1 tbsp lemon juice
100g good tinned tuna (optional)
30g pitted kalamata olives, chopped
4 sheets filo pastry, each cut into 2 15cm x 20cm rectangles (ie, 8 in total)





Notes and Queries

The long-running series that invites readers to send in questions and answers on anything and everything

QUIZ

Thomas Eaton

- 1 During the second world war, what were stored at Manod slate mine in Wales?
- 2 Whose house was named after a woman called Grace Toof?
- 3 Which dance arrived in Britain around 1812?
- 4 What were clinker or carvel built?
- 5 Which country was run by a junta known as the Derg?
- 6 "Life is short. Have an affair" is the motto of which website?
- 7 Pele's hair and Pele's tears are made from what?
- 8 In religious tradition,

- which fruit is said to have 613 seeds?
- What links:**
9 1 (193); 2 (26); 3 (59); 4 (189); 5 (163); 6 (232); 7 (n/a)?
10 Gene Autry; Sister Luc Gabriel; Allan Smethurst?
11 Big Brother; Great British Bake Off; Men Behaving Badly; Neighbours; University Challenge?
12 Elephantine; Gezira; Kitchener; Philae; Sai?
13 Tyson; Douglas; Holyfield; Bowe; Lewis; Usyk?
14 Aglaia, Euphrosyne and Thalia; Cunard, Port of Liverpool and Royal Liver?
15 Blythburgh, Suffolk; Dallas; Los Angeles; Hyannis Port, Massachusetts?

PUZZLES

Chris Maslanka

1 Wordpool

Find the correct definition: **GANOSIS**
 a) infestation by gannets
 b) limping
 c) reduction in shine of marble
 d) persuasion by tricks

2 Jumbles

Rearrange the letters of

PRETTINESS to make another word.

3 For the Birds

Find two birds in **CONURBATION**. Use each letter only once and once only.

4 Shake It

Name an instrument containing the vowels **A, E, I, O** and **U** each once and once only.

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CINEMA CONNECT

Killian Fox

Name the films and the female actor who connects them.



Answers
 Quiz 1 Artworks from the National Gallery. 2 Elvis Presley (Graceland). 3 Waltz. 4 Boat hulls. 5 Ethiopia. 6 Ashley Madison. 7 Lava (cooled). 8 Pomegranate. 9 Lengths in miles of UK motorways. 10 The Singing ... : Cowboy; Nun; Postman. 11 TV shows that moved channels: 4 to 5; BBC to 4; ITV to BBC; BBC to 5; ITV to BBC. 12 Islands on the Nile. 13 Undisputed world heavyweight boxing champions. 14 Three Graces; in Greek myth; buildings on Pier Head, Liverpool. 15 Death locations of the Kennedy brothers: Joseph Jr; John; Bobby; Teddy. **Cinema Connect** Ferrari; All About My Mother and The Counselor all star Penelope Cruz. **Puzzles**
 1 **Wordpool** c. 2 **Jumbles** PERSISTENT, PINSETTERS. 3 **For the Birds** ROBIN, TOUCAN. 4 **Shake It** TAMBOURINE.

CHESS

By Jonathan Speelman

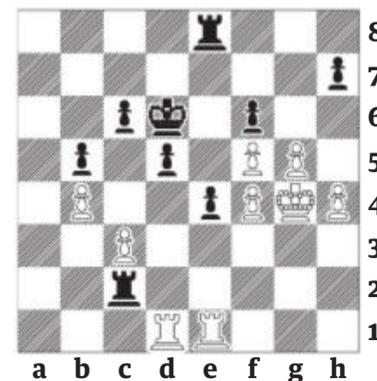
As we've been submerged under an inundation of football, the top chess action has been in Jermuk in Armenia.

This 10-player all-play-all featured five Armenians and five foreigners. It was dominated by young Indian star Arjun Erigaisi, who won with a round to spare, and together with a stellar result earlier in the French team championship has gained 17.1 rating points to move up to 4th in the live ratings, according to 2700chess.com. He finished on 6.5/9 ahead of Amin Tabatabaei (Iran), the

Armenian-American Sam Sevian and Bogdan-Daniel Deac from Romania on 5.

Apparently, together with Greek and Albanian, Armenian is considered one of three "isolated" Indo-European languages

Sevian v Martirosyan, Jermuk 2024. White played 32 gxf6 hoping to support the pawn with his king and ready to meet 32 ... Rf8 with 33 Rxe4. Can you see the brilliant move that dashed his hopes?



in the sense that it has no close living cousins. Their chess too is somewhat singular with a tendency towards cussed provocation that chimes with some of my own play. I enjoyed watching, especially this win by a member of the diaspora who was one of the youngest grandmasters against the highest rated of the five homegrown Armenians. *Observer Leonard Barden will return next week*

32...h5+!! 33 Kh3 Rxc3+ 34 Kh2 e3 35 Rg1 Rf8 36 Rg6 Rc2+ 37 Kg3 e2 38 f7+ Kd7 39 Ra1 Ra2! 40 Rc1 Rxf7 41 Kf3 Re7 42 Re1 d4 43 f6 Re3+ 44 Kf2 Ke6 45 f7+ Kxf7 46 Rxc6 Re4 47 Kf3 Re7 48 Rd6 Rd2 And White resigned.

COUNTRY DIARY

LAXEY BAY

Isle of Man

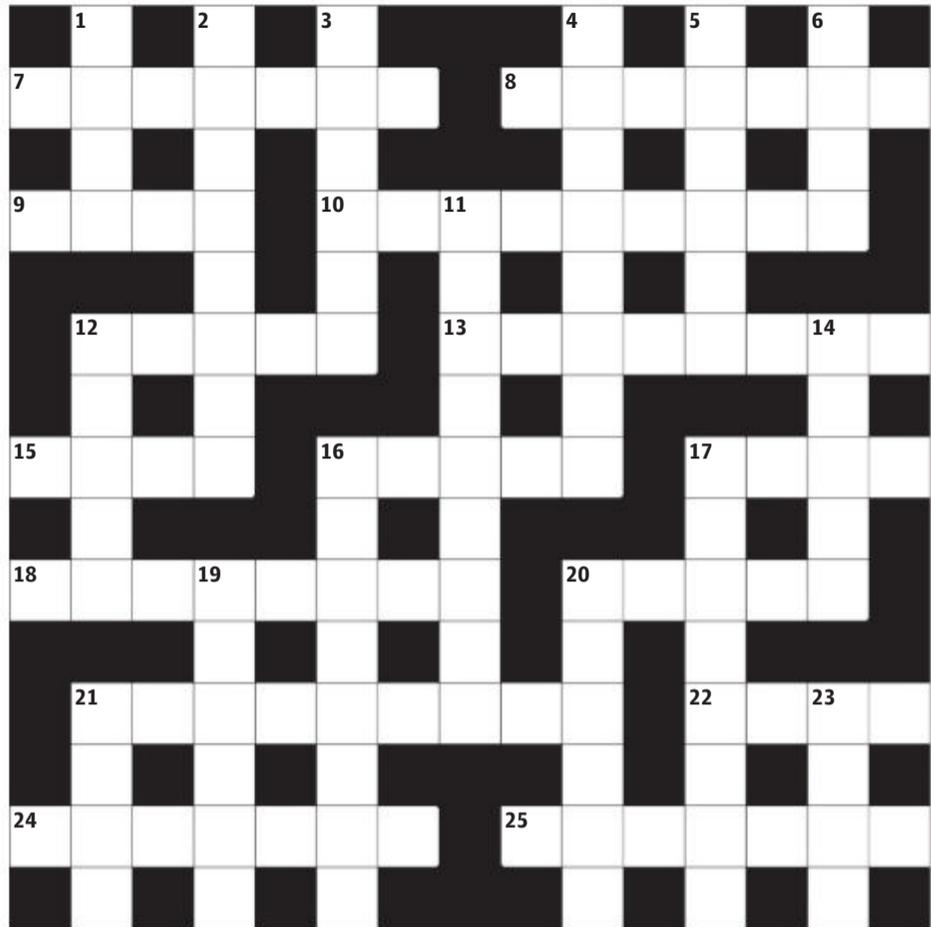
On the east coast of the Isle of Man there exists an extraordinary little bay that supports a wealth of wildlife. Today, flowering thrift bobs among the breeding gulls and a gannet plunges in the bay, gathering food for a chick that is, almost unbelievably, in Scotland. I have seen 99 different species of bird here; eiders now breed, joining black guillemots, choughs, oystercatchers and peregrines. We have nesting gulls that winter in Africa, replaced each year by a pod of bottlenosed dolphins that migrate up from Wales. Under the waves, an eelgrass meadow is recovering after bottom trawling was banned in 2009. The sandy bottom is home to spectacular small-spotted cat sharks as well as the venerable ocean quahog, a type of edible clam that can live to 500 years old and is one of the rarer species in all Britain and Ireland.

Laxey Bay was designated a strict marine nature reserve in 2018, forming part of the Isle of Man's commitment to protect 30% of our seas by 2030. Few of those paddling its cold waters will be aware that they are actually in a nature reserve - they don't usually come with ice-cream shops. For a marine area to be officially "protected" is no guarantee that it is safe from harm; but here the designation works.

Sadly, just a stone's throw from where the children swim is a never-ending flow of raw sewage. Not even filtered, it is the shame of our island. Adding insult to injury, there is not just one poo pipe but two. Many a summer's day at the idyllic Garwick cove is spoilt by an orange frothy scum lapping the shore. Politicians first pledged to stop the flow when I was a child, yet three decades later this criminality continues. When will we give the natural world the respect it deserves? *David Bellamy*



ILLUSTRATION: CLIFFORD HARPER



* All solutions published next week

The Weekly cryptic

No 29,412



By Brockwell

Across

- 7 Moralist turning up in front of train wreck (7)
- 8 Singer's entertaining dad dancing in Somerset village (7)
- 9 Start of silly season for Rishi? (4)
- 10 Wrecked boat at sea captured by revolutionary French artist (9)
- 12 Might some garden warblers return? (5)
- 13 No.7 in club team (8)
- 15 Supplies side-splitting joke (4)
- 16 Fellows invested in Spanish couple's tips (5)
- 17 One Republican in US showing a bit of flex (4)
- 18 Mike goes inside to make a meal for PM (5,3)
- 20 Spooner's subdued fish (5)
- 21 Four contrary aliens welcoming a conversation (4-1-4)
- 22 OXO rejected fine (4)
- 24 What Jack Sprat's wife did on counter holding fine cloth (7)
- 25 Staggering tax rise for comic character (7)

Down

- 1 Department of Justice usually recruits awful leaders (4)
- 2 Discharged current of gas (8)
- 3 Masons arranged for someone to do the heavy lifting (6)
- 4 American Dad! winning animated Oscar generates media events (5,3)
- 5 Proverbs in modern times? (6)
- 6/20 He crashed out before the end of race - that's bad luck! (4,6)
- 11 Maybe attaché provides a clue for B.O.? (9)
- 12 Group accepting the ending of Parklife is more offensive (5)
- 14 The German boy exhausted in race (5)
- 16 Test card broadcast from Mars? (8)

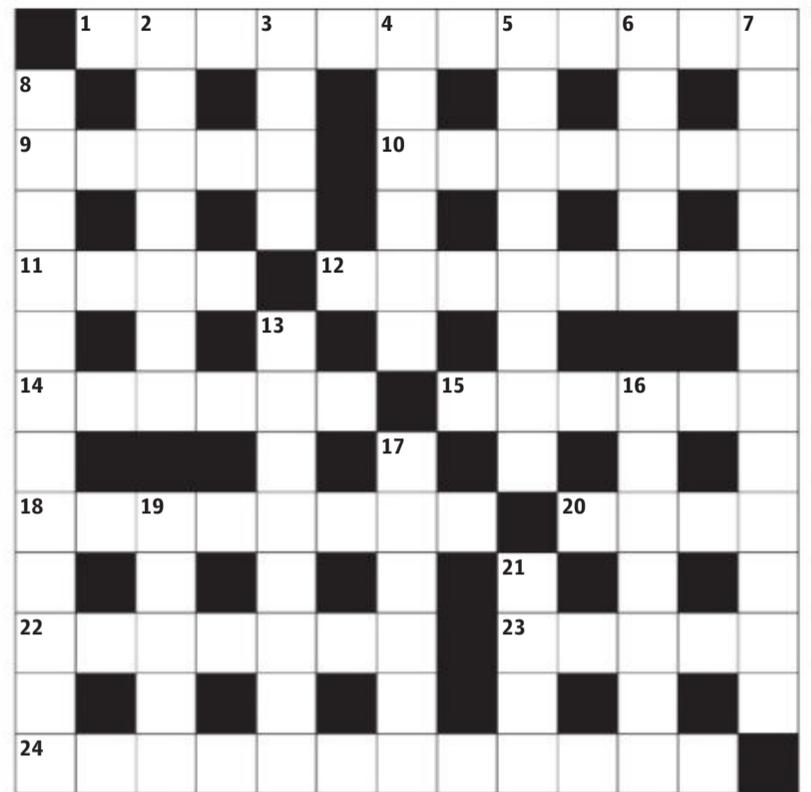
- 17 Rules written up claiming pole dancing is PC in Australia (8)
- 19 Soldier provided that answer for political movement (6)
- 20 See 6
- 21 Jack embracing Zulu king (4)
- 23 Greedy singer turns up (4)

Solution No 29,406

R	S	F	R	H	Y	B	T						
O	N	T	H	E	M	E	N	U	A	A	R	G	H
T	R	L	C	M	R	E	I						
T	W	I	G	L	O	O	B	A	D	N	E	S	S
E	D	A	I	U	S	Z	I						
N	O	E	L	F	L	I	G	H	T	L	E	S	S
T	N	F	E	I	S								
O	U	T	L	O	U	D	A	L	C	O	P	O	P
T							R	B	K	E	I		
H	E	L	I	C	O	P	T	E	R	S	T	U	N
E	A	R	I	R	O	E	A						
C	A	R	R	Y	O	N	R	O	S	T	R	A	L
O	Y	I	U	A	C	S	T						
R	U	N	I	N	P	E	N	S	A	C	O	L	A
E	X	G	S	T	R	N	P						

Quick crossword

No 16,885



Across

- 1 Cinder's lost property (5,7)
- 9 Salutation (5)
- 10 Ox (7)
- 11 Cloudy darkness (4)
- 12 Rebel (8)
- 14 'And ...?' (2,4)
- 15 A hound (6)
- 18 Trashy (8)
- 20 Swallow drop? (4)
- 22 Temporary stay (7)
- 23 First few notes (5)
- 24 Charged cumulonimbus (12)

Down

- 2 Uncultured (7)
- 3 Portree's Scottish isle (4)
- 4 Placate (6)
- 5 Damned (8)
- 6 Paler (anag.) (5)
- 7 John Braine novel - attic? (4,2,3,3)
- 8 Science kit for kids (9,3)

13 Tired (8)

- 16 Kneading and stretching Japanese therapy (7)
- 17 Black eye - light? (6)
- 19 Snug and elegant - chic (5)
- 21 _ pickle, herby cucumber (4)

Solution No 16,879

D	R	I	V	E	R	U	B	O	A	T	S
E	S	N		R	Z	H					
M	O	T	E	T	S	C	O	T	T	I	E
U	H	E	M	W	E	K					
R	E	M	O	R	S	E	N	A	C	R	E
E	U		L	I		L					
			S	P	I	E	L	B	E	R	G
S			M	A		I	K				
W	H	O	O	P	R	E	V	E	N	G	E
I	U	L	A	I	S	N					
F	O	N	D	A	N	T	N	E	E	D	Y
T	C	N		Y	N	A					
S	W	E	A	T	Y	F	L	A	G	O	N

Sudoku

Medium

Fill in the grid so that every row, every column and every 3x3 box contains the numbers 1 to 9.

Last week's solution

4	6	3	5	7	9	1	2	8
1	8	5	6	4	2	7	9	3
2	7	9	1	8	3	5	6	4
7	5	1	9	6	8	3	4	2
3	4	6	7	2	5	9	8	1
9	2	8	4	3	1	6	7	5
6	3	4	2	5	7	8	1	9
8	9	2	3	1	6	4	5	7
5	1	7	8	9	4	2	3	6

	5							
			6	5	7	8		
7			8	4	9		5	
6					2			
3	2	9					5	
5					1			
2			1	5		8		4
			7	2	5	6		
	1							

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